

RENI DICKMAN: SUMMARY OF THESIS

Title: Silent Voices: An Analysis of A Journey to the End of the Millennium by A.B. Yehoshua

Number and Division of Chapters: This Thesis is divided into five chapters:

1. A.B. Yehoshua
2. North vs. South
3. A Moral Divide
4. The Female Perspective
5. The Need for Dialogue

Materials Used: I used Masa el Tom HaElef by A.B. Yehoshua and its English translation, A Journey to the End of the Millennium, by Nicholas de Lange. The majority of my work involved translations of essays by Israeli literary figures found in a collection called Masot al Tom HaElef (Essays on the End of the Millennium). This work was published in Israel by HaKibbutz HaMe'uhad. To gain an appreciation of Yehoshua's style, I read "Facing the Forests" and Mr. Mani. I also read "B'Hitpas Ahar HaZ'man HaSepharadi HaAvud" and its translation, "Finding My Father in Sephardic Time," by Gilead Moragh, in which Yehoshua describes his relationship to the Sephardic community. Bernard Horn's Facing the Fires: Conversations with A.B. Yehoshua provided a thorough history of Yehoshua's literary career. Finally, secondary sources provided a description of Jewish life in Andalusia at the end of the first millennium.

Goal of the Thesis: This thesis seeks to provide an analysis of the characters and themes in A Journey to the End of the Millennium by A.B. Yehoshua. The reactions of Israeli writers provide the framework for my analysis as their interpretations challenged me to clarify my own reading. The story takes place at the end of the first millennium. However, it is clear that this medieval tale serves as a metaphor for today.

Contribution of the Thesis: This thesis provides translations of works not previously translated. As a result, it provides English readers with several different interpretations. Finally, the thesis relates the contemporary messages of the novel as suggested by Yehoshua and others. In doing so, the thesis portrays the nature of Israeli literature as political and social commentary.

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Introduction

In A Journey to the End of the Millennium, A.B. Yehoshua provides great detail yet at the same time, leaves much room for interpretation. His characters' limited words, their subtle movements and their prolonged silences invoke numerous interpretations. The reactions of Israeli writers provide the framework for my analysis of the characters and themes of the novel. Their interpretations challenged me to view the story from a number of angles. The novel takes place at the end of the first millennium. However, it is clear that this medieval tale serves as a metaphor for today.

Synopsis of A Journey to the End of the Millennium by A.B. Yehoshua

The year is 999. Ben Attar, a merchant from Tangier, sails to Paris to the home of his nephew and former business partner, Abulafia. Abulafia's new wife, Esther Minna, has issued a ban against her husband's partnership in protest to Ben Attar's bigamous marriage. In order to overturn her repudiation, Ben Attar gathers his two wives, his Muslim business partner, an Andalusian rabbi, a pagan servant, and a crew of Ishmaelite men and departs on a journey that will lead him to a world completely different from his own.

Ben Attar arrives at Abulafia's house and throws his arms around his beloved nephew. Abulafia's sense of southern hospitality and family loyalty forces him to welcome his relative into his home despite Esther Minna's aversion. Soon Esther Minna feels as if Ben Attar and his wives have invaded her home. However, she is pleased to meet Rabbi Elbaz who has accompanied Ben Attar in order to argue the merchant's case against the

repudiation. She looks forward to a debate between the Sephardic rabbi and the scholars of Ashkenaz whom she considers superior in every way.

The two parties travel to Villa Le Juif, a small village outside of Paris, to debate the issue of polygamy and the status of the business partnership. Rabbi Elbaz wins the respect of the villagers with his impressive yet confounding speech. In the end, they judges vote to reinstate the partnership between Ben Attar and Abulafia. However, when Esther Minna threatens to demand a divorce from Abulafia, Ben Attar and his party agree to a second trial in Worms, the original home of Esther Minna. When they arrive in Worms, Rabbi Elbaz chooses the hazan as the single arbiter between north and south. Ben Attar is defeated in Worms and banned not only from Abulafia but from the entire community.

In both trials, Yehoshua employs the testimony of his characters to reveal their true natures. False accusations, painful revelations, and surprising confessions emerge as different relatives take the stand. Throughout the journey, Yehoshua slowly exposes the thoughts and feelings of family members as they react to one another. Parisian officials, a priest, and an apothecary portray a sense of the religious fervor in Europe at the end of the first millennium. Yehoshua's novel is dense with detail yet leaves much room for interpretation. Each character displays strengths and weaknesses, and in the end, we are left to marvel at their complexity.

The characters rarely speak to one another. In fact, some remain silent through the entire story. We learn the most about them through silent glances, silent gestures, and the silent voices revealed only by the narrator. These voices express desire, fear, hatred, and

confusion. Yehoshua does not judge these silent voices. Rather, he presents them as an exhibition of human nature. In this way, he challenges his readers to examine the boundary between thought and deed. In the end, Yehoshua is concerned with the irreparable consequences of his characters' actions.

Yehoshua's tale presents a clash of cultures between North and South. Esther Minna claims that Ashkenzic scholars far surpass their southern contemporaries while Ben Attar and Rabbi Elbaz represent a vibrant Sephardic culture whose scholars interpret halakhah and create beautiful poetry. A Journey to the End of the Millennium records the tragic story of a family torn apart by customs and/or beliefs that cannot be reconciled. Their conflict challenges our conception of love and the idea of "partnership." As a result, their journey reveals insights as prudent today as they were 1000 ago.

Chapter One: Background of A.B. Yehoshua

Summary of "*B'Hipus Ahar HaZ'man HaSefardi HaAvud*" by A.B. Yehoshua

This essay appeared in Hebrew as the forward to his father's work *Yerushalayim HaYisbenah B'ayin U'valev*. It was translated into English by Gilead Morahg.

"Finding My Father in Sephardic Time"

A.B. Yehoshua has often been asked, "Where is your Sephardic heritage?" In answering this question the well-known author makes no apology for his identity as an assimilated Israeli. Avraham's father, Ya'akov Yehoshua, was a fifth-generation Sephardic Jerusalemite. As a result, the Sephardic community in Israel has often looked to Avraham to be the "great Sephardic writer." However, the assumption that Avraham should have absorbed a strong Sephardic identity from his father ignores the complexity of Avraham's life experience. Such an assumption denies the diverse backgrounds of both of his parents, the political and social realities of Israel in the early years of its statehood, and most of all, the independence of thought that characterizes one of Israel's most acclaimed authors.

Ya'akov Yehoshua was born in Jerusalem in 1908. He was ten years old when the British conquered the city in 1918. Ya'akov graduated from the Hebrew Gymnasium High School and went on to receive a Masters degree in Near Eastern Studies from the Hebrew University. He then began his doctoral work under a German-born professor named Ben-Et. Avraham describes the process as "a source of endless misery and frustration" (55)¹ for

¹ Page numbers refer to the English translation in *Moment Magazine*, October 1997.

his father who did not thrive under the tutelage of this strict and demanding scholar. Despite his father's failed efforts, and perhaps because of them, Avraham explains, his family, and especially his mother, "developed great admiration for German immigrants who were perceived as paragons of discipline and order." (56)

Rejecting academia, Ya'akov worked for the Mandatory government. Later he became head of the Department for Muslim and Druze Religious Affairs where he sought to maintain relationships between Israeli Arabs and the Israeli authorities. Avraham describes his father as "first and foremost, an Arabist." While most Sephardic boys of Ya'akov's generation learned Arabic in the markets of the Old City, Ya'akov was sent to an Arab tutor in the village of Silwan. His knowledge of Arabic helped foster relationships with Arabs throughout Israel. It also allowed him to publish two books in Arabic about the Palestinian Press.

Through his education and later his work, Ya'akov Yehoshua came into contact with the diverse population of Israel. As a result, Avraham recalls, his father did not consider the Sephardic community to be his only source of identity and belonging. Ya'akov was openly critical of the Sephardic Community Council, and he did not participate in public activities. His role models were the Jewish high officials in the Mandatory government, scholars at the Hebrew University and Russian students who had come to the Hebrew Gymnasium. On Friday nights, Avraham followed his father to an Ashkenazic synagogue while on Saturday mornings, he followed him to a Sephardic one.

The assumption that Avraham should have developed a strong Sephardic identity probably comes from his father's 12 books on the society and customs of the Sephardic communities of Jerusalem in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. However, Ya'akov did not embark on his literary career until age 60. In addition, his romantic descriptions of his Sephardic roots represent only a part of his life as described above. Ya'akov often gave his manuscripts to his son to read although, at times, Avraham lacked patience for such nostalgia.

Avraham describes the end of his father's life with great love and compassion. His father struggled and finally lost a battle with cancer. When the time came to bury him, Avraham and the rest of his family learned that his father had secretly secured a grave for himself in an old Sephardic cemetery on the lower slope of the Mt. of Olives with a spectacular view of Jerusalem. Avraham recalls, "I felt as if I was beginning a new dialogue with the man who wished to lie with his forefathers in the simplest and fullest sense of the term." (92) This scene is clearly reenacted in the first chapter of *Mar Mani* when Hagar Shiloh follows the funeral procession through a narrow alley to an old Sephardic cemetery overlooking Jerusalem. It is there that the judge, Gavriel Mani, is buried.

On the *shloshim* of his father's death, the family held a memorial service. "Friends from all his spheres of activities – Arabists, students from the Sephardic communities, public officials from the Ministry of Religion – spoke warmly and in interesting detail about his accomplishments." (92) At the end, Avraham asked that the three youngest grandchildren read from the final chapter of Ya'akov's last book. The chapter is called "I Am Seeking My Brothers." After the first two children read their parts, Avraham's youngest son, Nahum,

approached to read the last part. But he did not read it. Instead, the eight-year-old had memorized his grandfather's words. "He pronounced the names and terms that were written in Ladino with such sweetness that I found myself thinking that what I had not always been known to give to my father is now being given to him by my young son." (92) Perhaps it is this scene which best portrays Ya'akov's identity. He participated in diverse spheres of Israeli life. Yet, at the end of his life, it was his Sephardic heritage that accompanied him to the grave.

Avraham's mother also served as an important role model for her son. In describing the factors that caused him not to identify with the Sephardic aspects of his family, Yehoshua writes, "The main cause, I think, is connected to my mother and to the deep messages that she communicated to my sister and me." (56) She was not of Sephardic descent. She was born to a wealthy family in Mogador, Morocco. She came to the land of Israel with her father in 1932. The Sephardic community in Jerusalem was as foreign to her as the Ashkenazic one. Her language was French. Soon after she married, her father died and it was then that she felt her life was fully connected to the land of Israel. As a result, "She thought it only right to link her emotions to the world of the Zionist Ashkenazi community, which was the heart of the emerging country, and not to a community that she regarded as marginal." (57) It was toward this world that she directed her children.

And so Avraham's formative years were spent in a family that valued the accomplishments of the Ashkenazic establishment, that praised the German professors at the Hebrew University and that exposed him to the Arab population in Israel. He also

studied Talmud with his paternal grandfather who would walk through the streets of Jerusalem with a black cloak and a Turkish turban.

A.B. Yehoshua was also deeply interested in an emerging *Israeli* culture unique in its modern sense of Jewish nationalism, Hebrew culture, and democratic socialism; a society that exalted its soldiers and praised its pioneers. It is this culture, available to Yehoshua's generation unlike any other, that ultimately dominates his identity. He recalls,

I started to put the Sephardic part of my identity into a separate compartment. It wasn't a particularly small compartment and certainly not a locked one. But it was still a very distinct compartment, which would be opened from time to time, but was usually kept closed....I carried the double compartment of my Sephardic identity without the kind of conflict and guilt that often torment assimilating Jews in other countries. After all, I wanted to become an Israeli, not an Ashkenazi. (85)

Yehoshua explains that while he was growing up everyone had questions of identity.

None of us knew exactly what we were leaving behind at that time, but where we had to go was clear to all of us, especially my mother. We had to become part of the newly emerging Israeli character, which would eradicate all the uncomfortable attributes of our other identities. (85)

Yehoshua later became the leader of a kibbutz youth movement. On Friday nights he expounded the principles of secular democratic socialism. On Saturday mornings he took his tallit and kippah and walked through the neighborhoods of Talbieh and Rehavia to go to the Sephardic Orphanage near Mahane Yehuda - not to pray, but to sit next to his father. (86) "My presence in the synagogue was particularly important to my mother because of the chance of getting some extra points from God in whom I did not believe then and do not believe now. Although, I must confess, I'm still a little scared of him." (86) To an objective

observer, such a life sounds full of contradictions. However, anyone familiar with Israeli society will agree that it is precisely these kinds of contradictions that make Yehoshua's identity uniquely Israeli. He is at the same time a nationalist and a peacenik, a descendant and an individual, an atheist afraid of God.

Biographical Notes

Today A.B. Yehoshua teaches at Haifa University where he has been a professor of Comparative and Hebrew Literature since 1972. One of Israel's most recognized authors, he has written novels, essays and plays. For these he has been awarded the Israel Prize and the Bialik Prize, Israel's highest literary honors. Yehoshua's writing is characterized by its portrayal of deeply conflicted characters. Yehoshua uncovers these people, layer by layer until he reaches the farthest depths of the human psyche. He reveals their instincts while forcing his readers to wait and see if the characters will act upon them.

For Yehoshua, writing is a form of activism. As a committed Zionist and member of the Israeli peace camp, Yehoshua provides a "lively, controversial and prophetic voice in his homeland..."² In his collection of essays The Terrible Power of a Minor Guilt, Yehoshua argues for a moral interpretation of literature. This argument expresses his sense of literature as a stimulus for dialogue and change. In A Journey to the End of the Millennium, Yehoshua effectively challenges his readers to confront moral issues as relevant then as now.

² Program describing the Herman P. and Sophia Taubman Endowed Symposium in Jewish Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara, February 2002.

Chapter Two: North vs. South

Translation of "*Yehoshua: Bein Tsafon L'Darom*" by Adi Tzemah

Masot Al Tom Ha Elef pp. 25-33

"Yehoshua: Between North and South"

Until the end of the first millennium, the west (or as Abraham Yehoshua rightly calls it, the north) was (lit. did not have) not accorded great importance; Europe, from the Alps to the Pyreness was half- barbaric. The cultural world was the south. However, by the end of the second millennium, the entire situation was reversed. In the struggle between north and south, as well as the parallel rivalry between Judaism of the Christian lands, and Judaism of the Muslim lands, the former prevailed. During the second millennium the west became stronger financially, militarily, culturally, and demographically, so much so that it completely overshadowed the east, surpassing it in every way. Today we live under the hegemony of the west or we might say, the north. Therefore it appears to the reader that Avraham Yehoshua's new novel, Journey to the End of the Millennium, protests against the verdict of history: Was there any justification for this victory of the west over the east? Was this not a victory of ascetic fanaticism over beneficent liberalism? Was the downfall of the south not a disaster for humankind? And this, too, the reader assumes as self-evident: Yehoshua will uncover the source of enlightenment that is in the east; he will show us, who stand at the threshold of the third millennium, what is defective in our northern culture and what is worthwhile for us to learn from the culture of the south.

In order to show us all of this (the reader assumes) Avraham Yehoshua goes back one thousand years into the past, to the time when the process of cultural transformation began. In the world of the year 1000, Tangier is a large cultural center while Paris is a remote village, North Africa is rich while Germany is poor, and dark-skinned merchants sell blond hair, blue-eyed people as slaves in the African markets. In his story Yehoshua describes one cultural collision between the Jews of the south and the Jews of the north, and the reader in our day, assumes, according to the best of the humanist tradition, that Yehoshua stands on the side of the south to champion the voice of the east which suffered a terrible injustice.

The story is told from the perspective of Ben Attar, an endearing Jewish man, an honest merchant and trustworthy friend, and with him – i.e. with the Jews of the east – the reader is prepared to identify. Ben Attar and his men (people), Muslims and Jews, sail north to save relationships of family, friendship, and love, to protect Ben Attar's family from his European relatives who recoil from him, ostracize him and order a severance of the partnership between him and his nephew. (Apropos: The letters of the word "resh, tav, ayin" to recoil, emphasized in print throughout the book, signify the relationship of the north to the south; these letters are the reverse of the letters "ayin, tet, resh" which spell Attar.) Because Ben Attar from Tangier wishes to sustain his relationship (with his nephew) and Esther-Mina wants to (sever it) cut it off, it is clear which one (elicits) evokes our sympathy. Add to this the fact that the reader knows that the author himself is from the east, and in his great and wonderful novel, Molkho, he presented a struggle between a Sephardic man and the Ashkenazic family of his wife, and in Journey to the End of the Millennium a great dispute is conducted between the north and the south regarding marriage and love, and soon

a conditioned reflex is formed: we "understand" that Yehoshua stands on the side of the south; he defends the Sephardic family which the Ashkenazim reject in the name of some moral authority they cannot justify.

Up to now this has been the automatic interpretation of the novel, but in my opinion it is completely mistaken. Ben Attar's claim and that of all southern Jewry is that there is no inherent flaw in a polygamous marriage. True love does not have to flow through one narrow channel but rather it is possible for it to stream through several channels. Polygamy does not have to be based on oppression, dehumanization of women, discrimination, and sexual promiscuity but rather it is also possible that it should possess more love, consideration, and justice for the man and the women alike than is found in a monogamous marriage. It is this thesis that Ben Attar defends. Is the author joining Ben Attar and adding his voice in support of the rights of eastern Jews? Before I answer this question, I will preface my answer with the following question: Is it at all possible to write, in our day, a morally sensitive novel that defends a bigamist marital system? I think so. One hundred years ago this was considered a reactionary idea, and anyone who defended it (made a fool of himself) was considered a fool. However, in our generation those who are skeptical about the institution of the bourgeois family and conducts different sexual experiments, thirty years after the revolution of the sixties, it is no longer so. Thinkers of our day deal seriously with alternatives to monogamy. Today, a revolutionary author can also defend the polygamy of the east versus the monogamy of the Christian church and bourgeois society.

Is this the direction of the novel before us? Throughout the pages of A Journey to the End of the Millennium, numerous arguments are voiced by Rabbi Elbaz, Ben Attar, his

wives, and even the women judges of Villa Le Juif, in favor of the polygamous family. Nevertheless, I submit that Journey to the End of the Millennium is *not* a desperate written defense of polygamy: quite the contrary. Our automatic reflex misleads us. Ben Attar is not a tragic hero but rather an ironic hero who fights against a submachine gun with a sword. There is something sublime about him not because he falls in battle while justice is on his side, but because he is a Don Quixote, a naïve man who fights a hopeless war with ludicrous means. In the opinion of the author, egalitarian polygamy is absurd; and even though it is Ben Attar's romantic dream to have a perfect erotic threesome, it is not possible. History punishes him along with all of eastern Jewry. The author laments the east but also mocks it. He is fond of Ben Attar, but by no means does he take his side. (side with him) The author is with (on the side of) Esther-Mina: he looks at the east through her light (blue), northern, mocking eyes. He esteems her whereas he looks upon the people of the east with a smile and with pity. One might disagree with Yehoshua that polygamy is a failure, one might be skeptical of the assumption that the mature love of a man is a monogamous love for a strong-minded woman who fills the place of his mother (See Open Heart); I too disagree with Yehoshua on this point. Nevertheless this has no literary importance: There is no need for the basic assumption of the work to be right for it to function well in a book. For the reader, it is important to know, what is the thesis of the book. A reader who does not grasp this basic fundamental thesis properly, it is as if he has not read the book at all.

Hence, how is the life of Ben Attar conducted? How does a bigamist appear who tries to be sensitive and righteous? Very badly. The bigamy depicted by Yehoshua is a caricature, a phenomenon that elicits smirking. Journey to the End of the Millennium is a

comedy, a fact concealed by the lofty language of the book. A Hasid who might try to guess what a bigamous marriage looks like would not come up with a more peculiar (bizarre) thing. Ben Attar has set a regimen for himself that he must sleep with his first wife at the beginning of the night and afterwards, in order not to deprive the second wife, he has to get up, walk to the other end of the ship (or the other end of the house in Paris), and also sleep with her the same night. He is obligated to do this even if he is exhausted, even if he has no desire. This is his duty, an absolute imperative that is incumbent upon him. Because this obligation is a difficult one, the ship's crew is enlisted to help with this holy work, to fulfill every detail of the commandment of debauchery in the name of equality and justice.

The scene that opens the book, despite its lofty language, is extremely funny. So that he will not, God forbid, miss having intercourse with his second wife, Ben Attar orders his servant to wake him from the deep sleep into which he will have sunk after making love to his first wife. The slave wakes him in the middle of the night, and Ben Attar obeys. He "slips out of the tiny cabin and climbs the rope ladder onto the deck. Even though he knew perfectly well that his departure, however silent it was, would wake his wife, he was confident that she would have the self-control not to detain him. Not only was she aware of where his duty now lay, but it was even possible she shared his hope that he would be in time to discharge it (Tsemah's emphasis) before the dawn of day." (13, 3)³

What happened here? Where is the burning southern desire? Ben Attar behaves as if he must hoist a sail, chop wood, or perform some other difficult chore despite its unpleasantness! It is not desire that leads Ben Attar to the bed of his second wife but rather

a sexual obligation that compels his body and his soul. In order to succeed in the execution of the obligation of copulation "he forced himself to swallow some of the scalding stew and picked at the white flesh of the fish, so as not to drink on an empty stomach... Even though he sought to temper his spirit, and even to befuddle it enough to encourage the carefree humor that gives rise to a proper desire..." (17, 7) This is how a man behaves toward an inanimate object, for example, when he aims a gun, but not when he directs himself! This attitude of a man alienated from himself, as if he were only a tool, is comical. But the author does not settle for this, and he pushes the comedy to a new height. The direction of the machine of his body and his soul did not apparently, succeed, and the Sephardic man who is supposed to be passionate for the fresh young body of his young wife, falls asleep in the middle of his way to his beloved "on the hard boards of the deck." (27, 16) Now it is necessary to wake him a second time and send him to perform the exhausting sexual work. And so the grotesquerie runs wild: Ben Attar does not go quietly to his wife's bed. Instead he goes like a boxer entering the ring, a big crowd looks on as he passes from one woman to the next. "The crew, who, unable to abandon their curiosity even at this deep and intimate hour of the night, squinted drowsily to watch the Jew, the ship's owner, recharging his desire, anxious not to let himself down or to fail his second wife..." (14, 3-4) However, because our hero loses his way and falls asleep, there is fear regarding the execution of his mission, and it is necessary to wake him again. This is done according to the chain of command. First they wake the captain of the ship, Abd el-Shafi the Arab, and report the problem to him. The captain in turn, wakes Abu Lutfi, Ben Attar's partner, from a deep sleep "so that he should stir the ship's owner, sprawled in a drunken stupor on the deck, to visit the wife who was waiting for him in the stern." (27, 16) The slave also receives

³ First page number refers to the Hebrew. Second page number refers to the English

appropriate tasks and he stands ready "to raise aloft the oil lamp and light the way [of the man who is **demand**ed to hurry up and sleep (Tsemah's emphasis) with his second wife⁴] before the dawn should break." (78, 17) Thus, in a collective effort, in the end, the entire (meshullav - combined) crew of this copulation campaign succeeds in landing the husband in the arms of his wife.

With this the grotesquerie is not complete: on the contrary, in the bedroom it becomes even more burlesque. We imagine the man of the east to be someone who is spontaneous as opposed to the man of the west who is robot-like coerced by abstract commands. Yehoshua turned this stereotype on its head in his description of Ben Attar's sex life as contrived and forced according to some categorical and mechanical imperative. And the continuation is even more comical. Because Ben Attar aspires to prove to the Askenazim that a bigamous marriage can be based on respect and love, the author describes how Ben Attar awakens the desire of his second wife. "...[H]e permits himself to begin to caress her from the tip of her long thighs down to her toes, talking all the while softly and unhurriedly about **the prospect of his death** (Tsemah's emphasis)....And only thus, with the permission he gave her to contemplate without any sense of guilt a **new young husband** (Tsemah's emphasis) who would wed her after his approaching death, did her shuddering acceptance begin...talk about his death, which not only stirred her curiosity and hope (Tsemah's emphasis) for herself but also aroused her tender desire for him..." (37, 21) Behold therefore an example of marriage out of true love: what stimulates this woman is her hope for the death of the man lying with her at this moment, a kind of pity, and musings of lust for another man! Indeed, a really wonderful love story!!

translation.

The image of the bigamist as the possessor of prodigious sexual potency and a conqueror of women awakens thoughts of desire among the young women of the north. The court in Villa Le Juif, which consisted of five women and two men, ruled in favor of Ben Attar because of this image. Each one of the young women was attracted to the merchant from the land of Israel who himself was suspected of bigamy (146, 138-139) and (she) sensed that "anyone who went to such lengths to protect the husband of two wives would also feel strong enough to defend a third." (147, 139) The old woman (judge) dwelled repeatedly on the powerful appearance of Ben Attar, who might – who knew? The widow permitted herself to dream – enlist her as a supplementary wife on board his ship when it sailed back to his sunny homeland." (156, 148) Even Esther Minna gives herself over to a feeling of sexual submission which combines pain and pleasure (a feeling Ben Attar does not understand) and she "imagined herself as the third wife of the sturdy man who was lifting her up, feeling all the trembling of pain and humiliation in her new condition." (153, 146) At times she suspects but perhaps also wishes that "Ben Attar might be unable to curb his desire and might leave the large wagon in the middle of the night and raise the flap of the smaller wagon, to seek love even from one who did not owe it to him." (175, 168)

The stereotype of the man of the south as a proud macho individual, not bound like the northerner by his rigid super ego, undergoes a process of being made into a parody in Yehoshua's writing. The intimate talk of two lovers, Ben Attar and his young wife, which is supposed to arouse her sexually, becomes a litany of "the troubles and pains of kith and kin. (31, 21) From this discourse Ben Attar turns to a detailed discussion of his own death; he presents himself as someone who is about to die and eggs on his wife with the prospect that

⁴ English translation does not include these words which appear in the original Hebrew.

she will be widowed soon – indeed very macho! After this motivational talk, our hero “boldly removed all his clothes. But before lying down naked next to his wife he tied his ankles with some coils...and then he took off the heavy silver chain that hung around his neck and bound his wrists together with it, so that she would understand that nothing prevented her from taking whatever she wanted from his body and his soul.” (32, 21-22)

It is as if he says: do not look at me as a man but rather as a quarry from which you can extract what you need without relating to it in a personal way. How romantic! Yehoshua paints this man from the east not as one who captivates women in a storm of passion but as an old man, chained and naked before the woman who will use him as she pleases.

This description is connected to the central motif of Yehoshua's creation, the image of the worn out hero: the poet who has stopped writing, the commander who is sick of his responsibilities, the abandoned lover, the cancer-stricken engineer, the worn out husband, a mizrachi (oriental or Sephardic) man who is exhausted from his obligation, from his long tradition. He has had enough. He has no desire for this responsibility, he has no strength to continue, and he wishes to die (for example, the judge Mani who tries to commit suicide and his father who nullified himself.) In many stories (*HaMifaked HaAharon*, *Tardemat HaYom*) this motif appears as a powerful yearning for sleep with no end, a rest from life, the cessation of being. To stand up against this desire to fail, to sleep, or to die, the tired hero needs a new drug, new blood. In our story, this life-potion is the fair, strong, foreign, Ashkenazic woman, the granddaughter of “Vikings and Saxons” (65, 57 and 95, 88) and “fair-haired, blue-eyed, pagan servants” (189, 182) who eventually converted.

Now we can ask, why did Ben Attar travel to Frankish lands and then to the far land of Lotharingia? (Couldn't he find a suitable authority in Maghreb (North Africa) or Andalusia, places of Torah learning where one of their great scholars (Ben Ghiyat) was Ben Attar's own uncle? Was it indeed in order to gain an halakhic ruling allowing bigamy, a permit that not one of Israel's greats had yet challenged? A binding answer could also have been obtained from the Gaonim of Bavel, and there is no doubt as to what they would have ruled. Rabbeinu Gershom was also alive during this period (960-1028), but he is not mentioned because Yehoshua knows that the ban on polygamy attributed to Rabbeinu Gershom did not actually come until many years after 1000 CE. Therefore, is there any reason for such an exhausting and dangerous journey only to receive judgement from the employees of a winery outside Paris or from an unknown cantor in Worms? What is the value of such a ruling? From this perspective, the journey to Germany was certainly superfluous, for who would compel Esther-Minna to accept the decree of this judge from Worms and not to repeat her request for a Get if another ruling was pronounced against her? To these puzzles there is no solution if Ben Attar actually wanted to win. Was he dragged on a difficult journey on foreign land because of Rabbi Elbaz, who, after he won the argument in France, wanted to prevail again in Germany? For sure not. Why then, does Ben Attar set out on this journey? Because he needs this new woman; she is his life-potion, without which he will decay.

We must remember that Ben Attar pays a heavy price for his attraction to Esther Minna and the romance that he did not have with her. The work ends with his precipitous downfall. As a result of the time spent in Paris, he loses his authority as the master of the ship, and his men rebel against him. First, Abd al-Shafi the captain, then Abu Lutfi the

partner, and finally, even the sailors speak to him (to Ben Attar) with "impudent speech," (306, 297) [aggressive and crude] and they are not afraid to threaten him. Even Rabbi Elbaz rises up against him. (307, 298) On the last page of the work we receive a hint as to the fate more terrible than death that awaits him. "...[T]he waves of the raging ocean...and fierce northern winds would turn the fate of the second wife into a gentle, easy story compared to the story of what awaited her husband and his party." (318, 308) If these were only the fears of Rabbi Elbaz, the author would not have adopted the future tense, but rather he would have said, "fierce northern winds which were liable (Tsemach's emphasis) to turn [reverse] the fate of the second wife..." (318, 308) or the like. And what is more: the book closes with the line, "Is there a sea between us, that I should not turn aside to visit thee?" (318, 308) which is attributed here to Rabbi Elbaz. Because this line is that of Shmuel HaNagid, this attribution is possible only if the ship is torn apart or if its passengers are murdered; if the passengers had returned to their homes safely, the line would have appeared in a poem of Elbaz and not of HaNagid. Therefore, it is possible to assume that this line is all that survived of Ben Attar's ship.

Ben Attar is aware of the real reason for his voyage/sacrifice. "...[I]n truth it was not Abulafia's heart that he was trying to win back by means of this crazy journey, but that of his new wife, who, though he had never beheld her face nor heard her voice, was extremely important to him..." (95, 87) Ben Attar made the journey in order to meet the new woman – namely, the modern woman. But why? In order to prove to her that the old ways of love are no less good than the new ones? For this, as was said before, he did not need to take one step away from his home. We must guess then, that Ben Attar, like other heroes of Yehoshua, wanted to lose, and not to win. He does not come to the north in

order to defend the south and to recapture his nephew's heart but rather in order to be conquered by the new love ideal. His two wives are "like two big bears" (191, 185) and their main utility is for sexual intercourse. The author is careful not to give them names – they are nothing but "first wife" and "second wife"; whereas if the new wife is an independent persona, she and her family have a name. This is a woman of a new type: a woman who is a healer of the soul.

Abulafia, for example, is a difficult case. His wife committed suicide, his daughter is mentally disabled and disturbed, and he hates his mother. He hides behind masks, flees from himself into invented personalities and dreams of great revenge in his hometown. (557, 54) His masquerading is compulsive, (he disguises himself) when he needs to and when he does not need to (21, 11) and for a long time he distanced himself completely from the company of Jews. (61, 53) This man, who stood on the threshold of insanity was redeemed from his distress through the conversational therapy (Tsemah's emphasis) of Esther Mina who is "older than him by approximately ten years." "It was the first time he had met anyone who took the old story of his pain and affront seriously and listened with open sympathy to his continuing dream of revenge." (63, 54); Abulafia "like a child reading his mother's lips, he sought the precise meaning of this slim, small woman's words," (63, 54) which "had subtly lanced the boil of his hatred for his mother [in order to caress him with a slender white finger⁵]" (63, 55) and he "was so moved by the older woman's curiosity..." (64, 56) Her role, role of the psychologist, is completely clear. Ben Attar was already amazed back then to discover that this woman was interested in him. "*Me too?* Ben Attar asked in a whisper, with his head cocked and with a surprised laugh..." (64, 56) What Esther

⁵ Bracketed words do not appear in English translation

Mina offers he cannot receive from his wives. The abscess of poison, which the schizoid Abulafia received from his shrewish mother and passed on to his disabled daughter, his mother apparently received in the home of *her* parents – the parents of Ben Attar. Ben Attar is also in need, therefore, of Esther-Minna's care.

And so, without deviating from the fictitious framework, Esther-Minna is described as a Freudian therapist: "Picking up her chair, she placed it at the head of the bed, behind the child, who was lying on his back, washed and perfumed, so that he would not see her face and fear her reactions but might think that he was talking to himself in a dream. In fact the whispered questions of the hidden woman brought instant replies from the innocent young heart, although not in the language in which they were asked. ...Even though Mistress Eshter-Minna understood not a word...she did not interrupt the flow of the words, but listened very intently." (292, 285) The framework is Freudian, and similarly the subject matter: the gathering of information, for example, that is enclosed "in a foreign language." The eastern man has come to the edge of perdition, whose love life has been made grotesque, travels therefore, to the therapist in Paris. He comes to be helped, but his cover story is that he has come to help. Ostensibly, there is new merchandise in his saddlebag: he offers the Ashkenazim the philosophy of love of the south, an egalitarian, triangular and complete love. This is the way Rabbi Elbaz describes him: "No, Rabbi Elbaz saw Ben Attar not as a merchant but simply as a man disguised as a merchant....he was a loving man, a philosopher and sage of love, who had come from far away to declare publicly that it is possible to have two wives and to love them equally." (140, 134) In truth, Ben Attar is a patient; as a philosopher of love he is a complete failure.

Nevertheless the message of Ben Attar's love agitates the spirits of and seduces the women of the north, and Esther-Minna checks if there is any substance to him, immediately upon meeting the two women who are supposed to embody this kind of love. "...[T]he first wife and the second wife were asked for the first time in their lives to reveal to each other the hidden secrets of their nakedness, and in the presence of a third woman, a stranger, blue of eye and short of stature, who was not content with looking from afar, from a corner of the room, but approached and took the jug from her maidservant's hand to rinse the tangled braids and to scrape with niter and soap the curved backs and soft bellies, the breasts, heavy hind parts, shapely long thighs....although still without elucidating the secret that joined them in the perfection of a single love." (106, 97-98) This scene is of course ironic: the secret to the completeness of love is not physical.

Thus one must understand the only orgy in the book – the black (slave) with the three French women. Polygamy, the author implies, is possible for the black (slave) who is nature itself, infinitely flexible: he is homosexual (the lover of Abu Lutfi 173, 165) and heterosexual; he is a boy and an adult, he is an idolater, a Jewish righteous convert, and the image of Jesus Christ; he is a stranger and yet at home in every place. Perhaps polygamy suits nature, but not us, people who live in society: among us it will not succeed. This central thesis is interwoven throughout the novel. I am not claiming that this thesis is correct in reality, but rather only this, that we will understand Journey to the End of the Millennium only if we understand that this is its thesis, a teaching that comes not from the south but rather from the north.

The message to the south is (that of) egalitarian monogamy. The command to Ben Attar is: Let your first wife, the older one, be your only and full wife. Journey to the End of the Millennium is therefore, a moralistic novel (perhaps an answer to Celine's nihilistic Journey to the End of Night?) which sketches a (kind of) therapy for an ailing culture. The change in the personality of the first wife and in the nature of her relationship with her husband are the clear positive product of the journey. This change begins to occur during the journey on land, when the first wife is renewed and becomes a housewife in the style of Ashkenaz. The others "...allowed the renascent housewife to take command and do whatever she wished..." (174, 167) With the death of her rival and the downfall of her husband, the first wife also reveals a new voice (a known feminist motif): "Just as he was about to call again, his wife removed her veil and, anticipating him, gave a loud, wild shout that he would never have imagined her capable of producing." (311, 301)

The strongest expression of the metamorphoses in the sexual relationship, of the birth of a new relationship between a man and his wife, is given in a symbolic scene, in which it is as if the first wife is made fertile by the tears of her husband over the death of his second wife. From this tear will be born the new incarnation of the first wife as a whole/complete woman, single, who absorbs the other woman into her. "Sometimes it is precisely when manhood fails and gives way that maleness takes on a sweet and attractive taste. Even though she knew the tears were for the second wife, who was lost forever, for whom henceforth he was precluded from finding a substitute, she was neither offended nor angry. On the contrary, she felt proud that the tears for a woman who was lost were not lost themselves, but flowed between her own breasts and dripped into her navel. She had a hope that the second wife's tears might moisten her own desire and enter in all purity into her

womb, this womb that now parted its lips to whisper with its little tongue the **sole wife's**
announcement..." (Tsemah's emphasis) (296, 288)

Reaction to Adi Tsemah

Introduction: An erroneous reading

In his analysis of A.B. Yehoshua's Journey to the End of the Millennium, Adi Tsemah criticizes what he calls an "automatic interpretation" of the story and in turn presents an alternative exegesis of Yehoshua's latest work. Tsemah writes that one might *think* Yehoshua "stands on the side of the south to champion the voice of the east which suffered a terrible injustice." One might *think* that Ben Attar sailed to Paris to defend his bigamous marriage and to rekindle his relationship with his beloved nephew. However, Tsemah claims, one who understands the book in this way, "it is as if he has not read the book at all." Instead, Tsemah argues that A Journey to the End of the Millennium is not a desperate defense of polygamy and the ways of the south but rather an ardent defense of monogamy and the enlightened ways of the north.

Tsemah employs other works by Yehoshua where the author champions the Sephardic cause to argue that one might *think* Yehoshua is committed to defending the Sephardic cause in his later writing as well. Tsemah does not give Yehoshua's readers enough credit. Instead he criticizes us for our simplistic reading while he offers an interpretation equally one-sided.

Journey to the End of the Millennium is not simply the story of a cultural collision where one must take sides – north or south, east or west. On the surface, the novel focuses on the competition between these two worlds. However, this cultural collision quickly becomes a vehicle for Yehoshua's more enticing and complex subjects: love, loyalty, conflict and loss.

I agree with Tsemah that Yehoshua stands on the side of monogamy. However, the defeat of polygamy is not the defeat of the south, and the victory of monogamy is not an all out victory for the north. Polygamy does not define the south as a place of total absurdity nor does monogamy define the north as a place of everlasting enlightenment. Through an array of intimate relationships Yehoshua illustrates that the complexities of human relationships transcend cultural boundaries.

Tsemah asks the wrong question. The novel is not an expression of Yehoshua's ambivalent feelings towards his Sephardic roots. It is an expression of his familiarity with both the Ashkenazic and Sephardic worlds and his ability to write about the universal human condition.

I. Ben Attar

A. Ben Attar "fighting a submachine gun with a sword."

Tsemah argues:

Ben Attar is not a tragic hero but rather an ironic hero who fights against a submachine gun with a sword. There is something sublime about him not because he falls in battle while justice is on his side, but because he is a Don Quixote, a naïve man who fights a hopeless war with ludicrous means. (Tsemach 26)

I do not agree with this. Ben Attar brought his two wives with him in order to demonstrate the tranquility of his dual marriage. He also brought with him a rabbi from Andalus, a great center of learning, in anticipation of a debate between Rabbi Elbaz and qualified Ashkenazic rabbis. It is Esther Minna and Master Levitas who procure ludicrous means in the form of three scribes summoned to serve as judges in the deliberations between north and south.

Master Levitas and Esther Minna are the children of a great scholar. Surely they know the difference between a learned rabbi capable of following the intricacies of Talmudic debate and a scribe who tries to "...discern what is written merely to copy it over and over again." (Yehoshua, p.118)⁶ Upon meeting the appointed judges Rabbi Elbaz expresses his disappointment. "Scribes?" he asks.

But Master Levitas thought highly of them. They would be able to judge on the basis of what was written in books. But what books? And what was the point of books? Rabbi Elbaz protested vehemently. If the answer was written explicitly in a book, would it have occurred to him to leave his city and entrust himself to the ocean to demand justification for his employer? Would he have allowed Ben Attar to put his wives at risk for something that was written in a book? (Yehoshua 118)

Rabbi Elbaz "demanded, in a wild shout that seemed unlikely to issue from such a pleasant, dreamy personality, that the judges should be changed forthwith." Abulafia "understood well the rabbi's shouted demand for the replacement of these judges, who had certainly prejudged the case..." (Yehoshua 118-119) At once it became clear that the Andalusian rabbi would not stand for such patronizing treatment. He refused to leave the decision in the hands of three untrained men chosen by the winery's owner, a close friend of Master Levitas. Rabbi Elbaz exposed the absurdity of Master Levitas' plan and within minutes installed a new panel of arbiters less educated than the scribes but more impartial to the cause.

In round one, Ben Attar does not appear to be a naïve Don Quixote but rather a shrewd litigant capable of garnering the sympathy of the strangers around him. In his own cunning speech he accuses his nephew, Abulafia, of attributing the words of the repudiation

⁶ Page numbers refer to English translation.

to his new wife so that Abulafia may enter into some other, more lucrative partnership. In addition to his own creative testimony, Ben Attar has on his side the talents of the Andalusian rabbi. Fortunately, Rabbi Elbaz proves to be quite skilled at weaving philosophical musings into language confounding enough to impress an audience of grape stampers. Ben Attar's "sword" proves to be powerful enough in Villa Le Juif.

B. Caricature of a bigamist

Tsemah depicts the first scene in the novel as a comedy in order to show that Ben Attar is nothing but a caricature of a bigamist. According to Tsemah, Ben Attar hardly has enough passion to fulfill one wife's sexual needs let alone two. The merchant from Tangier enlists the entire crew of the ship to aid him in his marital duties.

Although Ben Attar has difficulty fulfilling his wives sexual needs while on the boat, there are illusions to a perfectly satisfying sex life back in Tangiers at least in terms Ben Attar's physical capabilities.

In the city a veritable maze of alleys separated his two houses, so that each wife could feel that her universe was separate and self-containedsome nights, smitten with the anxiety of delicious longing, he climbed up onto the roof and floated across to the roof of the other house over the domes of the white city, which lay still in the moonlight like the breasts of pale maidens floating on a lake, as though her were a sailor leaping from prow to stern. (Yehoshua 18-19)

Ben Attar's fatigue in the first scene of the book can be interpreted as physical exhaustion from travelling as well as emotional distress regarding the mission of his journey. Tsemah reads the opening scene as a comedy, and indeed there are comic moments, however, an opposite reading is also possible. Ben Attar can be seen as a man so devoted to his wives

that he does not disappoint them. Even on such an arduous voyage, his wives' needs remain a priority even if he must enlist the help of his fellow travelers.

Tsemah is correct when he claims that Yehoshua portrays Ben Attar's dual marriage as a failure, but not because of Ben Attar's lack of sexual prowess. An investigation of Ben Attar's physical capabilities leads one to examine his capabilities on a deeper level, namely his inability to understand the emotional needs of his wives. He provides for them materially and sexually. However, he fails to understand their need for a deeper connection.

C. Ben Attar's need for a life-giving drug in the form of Esther Minna

Taking his cues from other works by A.B. Yehoshua, Tsemah portrays Ben Attar as a worn out hero in need of a new life-drug, an elixir of sorts that will awaken him to life renewed. Without this potion, Ben Attar will decay. However, Tsemah provides no evidence of Ben Attar's psychological or emotional needs while he is living in Tangier other than his pain over the loss of his business partnership with his beloved nephew. Tsemah goes too far in his portrayal of Ben Attar's inner life. If he is a naïve Don Quixote, how can he have such a complex inner life?

Tsemah points to Ben Attar's sister (Abulafia's mother) as well as Abulafia to argue that mental illness plagues their entire family. First he argues that Abulafia's love of disguise is a result of schizophrenia. Tsemah goes on to claim that because Ben Attar's sister suffered from depression after the birth of her "bewitched" granddaughter, Ben Attar must also suffer from some kind of mental illness. Such psychoanalysis is unfounded.

There are no overt signs of mental illness in Ben Attar - certainly no signs like those in others of Yehoshua's characters. At no time during the book did I sense that Ben Attar needed to be taken care of like Judge Gavriel Mani who kept a noose prepared for himself or Dr. Mani who, in the end, committed suicide at a train station in Beirut. Ben Attar is nowhere near as complex a character as the tormented graduate student in Yehoshua's short story, "Facing the Forests." The Manis and the graduate student turned forest ranger exemplify complex, troubled, questioning men. How can Tsemah call Ben Attar a naïve Don Quixote and then paint him as a man so in need of an elixir that he travels to Paris in search of healing from his nephew's wife? I interpret Ben Attar to be much stronger than that. Whereas the Manis and the forest ranger attracted my attention because they seemed weak, Ben Attar attracted my attention because he appeared strong.

Tsemah argues that Ben Attar is mentally "worn out." However, he provides no evidence that Ben Attar is worn out from anything other than the voyage itself. Tsemah implies that Ben Attar is "worn out" from a lack of emotional connection to his wives. He employs the following scene to demonstrate Ben Attar's desire for a woman who listens like Esther Minna.

On the evening of the ninth of Av in the year 4755, Ben Attar and Abulafia sit together by the campfire and speak of the year that has passed. Yehoshua describes in detail the first conversation between Abulafia and Esther Minna. As Yehoshua relates their communication it is not entirely clear what Abulafia shares with his uncle and what is revealed to the reader alone.

It appeared that it was not only because she was a widow and childless, nor only because she was exposed to him in the somewhat licentious air of a wayside inn, but particularly because she was some ten years his senior that Abulafia had given himself easily to a lengthy conversation, which led him to a deep association that he had not imagined himself capable of. ...When the cross on the belfry pierced the flesh of the moon, which was as round and pale as the famous local cheeses, and slowly let it drop behind the church, and total darkness fell in the chamber in which the pair were sitting, Abulafia felt a pleasant warmth spreading through his body. (Yehoshua 54)

Although it is hard to tell, I read these words as Yehoshua's description and possibly Abulafia's private contemplation, but not an experience openly communicated to Ben Attar.

The scene continues: "He could only talk of the astonishment and gratitude that had coursed through him at the end of that conversation. Here at last is somebody who gives rest to my soul, he had thought to himself as he inhaled the woman's unfamiliar scent." (Yehoshua 54) Here too it is unclear what Abulafia revealed to his uncle and what he did not. I make the distinction between what Abulafia shared and what he harbored in his heart because it affects one's reading of Ben Attar and his attitude toward Esther Minna.

Tsemah seems to say that Ben Attar understood the comfort Esther Minna provided Abulafia's soul and as a result, Ben Attar desired this kind of connection for himself. First, it is unclear whether Ben Attar truly comprehends the depth of Abulafia's feelings for Esther Minna. Second, I do not read Ben Attar as a man who ever felt himself to be in exile from human connection. Therefore, it seems improbable that Ben Attar could relate to his nephew's longing because Ben Attar never suffered in the same way as Abulafia. (Yehoshua 71) Again, I interpret Ben Attar as a man who believes he loves his wives and who is genuinely concerned for his lonely nephew. To read more complexity into Ben Attar is to

deny him the role of the simple, strong man around whom other, more complicated characters embark on true journeys of transformation.

D. Reasons for the journey

Ben Attar's claim and that of all southern Jewry is that there is no inherent flaw in a polygamous marriage...Polygamy does not have to be based on oppression, dehumanization of women, discrimination, and sexual promiscuity but rather it is also possible that it should possess more love, consideration, and justice for the man and woman alike than is found in a monogamous marriage. (Tsemah 26)

This is indeed Ben Attar's claim, but is this *why* he embarks on such a dangerous journey?

Tsemah argues against such a simplistic reading. Instead he asserts that the truth lies beneath the surface, deep within the psyche of Ben Attar as described earlier. However, if Ben Attar is a naïve, Don Quixote, as Tsemah claims, then it makes more sense that the purpose of his journey should be a simple one rather than the result of a complex psychological need. (Tsemah never clarifies whether Ben Attar understood this psychological need or whether only Yehoshua and the enlightened reader understand this.)

What then, was the purpose of his journey? I would argue that his mission lay in defending not only his right to a dual marriage, but something even dearer to him, namely, his honor. As stated before, Esther Minna "...was extremely important to him, particularly from the moment she had reached out to impugn his honor." (Yehoshua 87) A letter from an Andalusian rabbi or the Gaonim in Babylonia vindicating his dual marriage could not have accomplished this. Esther Minna's claim that Ben Attar's wives lacked anything impugned his honor as a man and a husband. A letter from the Gaonim would not have been proof of his devotion to his wives. That Esther Minna was willing to destroy his family

over the issue of polygamy was also intolerable to Ben Attar. Only a personal mission would convince his new kin of his undying commitment to Abulafia and his refusal to abdicate this relationship.

II. Esther Minna

A. The repudiation

Esther Minna has no legal recourse in this case. The takanah of Rabbeinu Gershom only applies to Ashkenazic Jews and therefore has no bearing on Ben Attar and his dual marriage. She could have asked Abulafia to end the partnership because she desired his company at home, the routes were too dangerous, and/or she hoped to start a family with him. Any of these arguments would have expressed her love for Abulafia. Instead, Esther Minna creates a permanent rift in her new family when she demands an end to the partnership in protest to Ben Attar's dual marriage.

In contrast to Esther Minna, Ben Attar does have a valid claim against his nephew who cancelled the partnership without his uncle's consent. Ben Attar, however, is the product of a different culture. His life is full of color while Esther Minna's is black and white. Ben Attar searches for unity while Esther Minna strives to be right.

B. A "modern woman"

Tsemah argues that Yehoshua esteems Esther Minna as a "modern woman," but it is difficult to find evidence of Yehoshua's acclaim. From the beginning of the novel, Esther Minna is a woman who judges people she has never met. Once she does meet her southern

relatives she remains as narrow-minded as before. Although she considers herself enlightened, she is as parochial as the grape stampers in Villa LeJuif.

According to Tsemah, she is a modern woman, but she lives in her brother's house even after she marries Abulafia. She also willingly submits to the paternalistic system of medieval halakhah. (For further discussion of this see Almog essay.) Granted, any argument for halakhic reform on her part would have seemed anachronistic. Nevertheless, her submissive role in relation to her brother, the mention of her participation in halitza (Yehoshua 182), and her introduction as the "childless widow of a scholar" (Yehoshua 53) point to a woman mired in traditional gender roles.

When the parties arrive in Villa Le Juif, Rabbi Elbaz learns that Master Levitas has appointed three scribes to judge the case. The Andalusian sage immediately rejects the scribes and insists on choosing new judges. Rabbi Elbaz suggests

that it would be proper to make do with the spirit of the ancient sages, which was the true spirit that could transform, say, the whole congregation of simple, goodhearted Jews into a public tribunal that might judge and save either the plaintiff or the defendant, as was stated in the book of Exodus: *to incline after the multitude.*" (Yehoshua 119)

Esther Minna asks, "*All of them? Including the women?*" Upon reading her question, I pictured her with a shrewd smile insisting on female judges as well as male. I assumed a "modern woman" would demand the participation of women in a trial about polygamy. However, my assumption was wrong. After the judges are chosen – five women and two men – we learn that Esther Minna was "confused by the ease with which the panel of judges had been filled

with women." (Yehoshua 122) From this we learn that she does not desire female judges at all. Instead she is troubled by the non-traditional nature of the court.

C. Esther Minna as litigator

It is difficult not to despise Esther Minna after the first trial in Villa Le Juif. Her words are so abhorrent it is a wonder her relatives do not interrupt her as she presumes to speak for Abulafia's dead wife. In her testimony, Esther Minna asserts that Abulafia's first wife drowned herself out of fear that her husband would take a second wife with whom he might sire healthier children.

And so, did Esther Minna have any need to justify herself for the repudiation that spread within her? It grew greater with time and sharpened like a spear which could not only defend her new husband against the disgrace of discovering among the sacks of spices and the copper vessels in Benveniste's stable and additional wife, brought for him in the ship by his uncle, but also, yes indeed, to avenge, however inadequately, the sorrow and fears of the drowned wife, who had been taken naked from the watery depths." (Yehoshua 130)

Her "insight" stuns her husband who must translate her testimony into the local tongue for all the villagers to hear. Her behavior is simply manipulative and cruel.

D. Esther Minna's ancestry

We hear nothing about the facial features of Ben Attar's wives. We read only of their shapely bodies. On the contrary, we learn nothing of Esther Minna's body, but we do know that she has flaxen hair and blue eyes. Although her features mark her as an attractive woman, I suspect her fair complexion represents something deeper.

During their annual visit at the Bay of Barcelona, Abulafia describes Esther Minna to his uncle. Abulafia portrays his future wife as an "a small, elegant woman with her hair gathered at the back, perhaps so as to reveal her intelligent face and her pale eyes better."

(Yehoshua 57)

Pale? Pale in what way? Ben Attar wondered. When Abulafia described the precise tinge of blue of the widow's eyes and flaxen color of her hair, likening it poetically to the color of the ocean licking the golden sands of the North African coast, Ben Attar's soul trembled, for not only did he now sense Abulafia's responsive love for the new woman, but for the first time he understood that there might be Jews in the world whose most remote ancestors had never been in the Land of Israel. (Yehoshua 57)

When Ben Attar meets his northern adversary for the first time, "he reflected with an inward chuckle, whether some savage Viking or Saxon blood might not be coursing in her pious veins, or glimmering in the deep blue stare with which her eyes were now fixing on her own." (Yehoshua 88)

Later, Esther Minna returns to her marital chamber in Worms which

...was said to have served as the sleeping quarters for the first generations of Jews to come at the king's command from Italy, who had brought with them from the Alps some fair-haired, blue-eyed pagan servants who were so devoted to their Jewish masters that they had eventually cast off their strange idols and adopted their faith. (Yehoshua 182)

It seems plausible to say that Esther Minna has some non-Jewish ancestors. It is all the more ironic then that she takes it upon herself to dictate the proper Jewish lifestyle.

We also learn that before Esther Minna married her first husband she and/or her parents refused Joseph son of Kalonymous as a possible suitor because his ancestry was mixed. While his father was a full member of the Kalonymous clan, his mother was descended from the legions of Julius Caesar who had fought there more than a thousand years earlier. (Yehoshua 191)

III. Repulsion and Attraction

Tsemah describes a subtle sexual attraction between Esther Minna and Ben Attar. The two adversaries communicate through Abulafia or in front of a court, never to one another. At times we are privy to their provocative thoughts or the narrator's suggestive perceptions. These sporadic insights expose a potent blend of attraction and disgust.

A. The foreign Jewess

Upon hearing about Esther Minna,

Ben Attar was interested in her words and her questions rather than in her form and the nature of her woman hood. But as he came to recognize the particular excitement that informed the speech of his partner... Ben Attar also began to interest himself in the appearance of the woman from the Rhineland.... (Yehoshua 56)

Was the uncle merely curious as to the appearance of a foreign Jew, or does this represent the beginning of a hidden attraction? Tsemah employs the following quote to suggest a romantic interest:

...in truth, it was not Abulafia's heart that he was trying to win back by means of this crazy journey, but that of his new wife, who, though he had never beheld her face nor heard her voice, was extremely important to him..." (Yehoshua 87)

However, Tsemah ignores the end of the sentence. She was important to him "particularly from the moment she had reached out so surely from a distance to impugn his honor."

(Yehoshua 87) This quote reveals an attitude more conflicted than Tsemah suggests. At times during the ocean journey Ben Attar

...went so far as to imagine that he could bring to Abulafia's new wife in Paris...not only living proof that would overcome her opposition but a new, sharp temptation that she would have no defense against – a temptation that he could now feel upon his flesh, in his loins...
(Yehoshua 23)

Did Ben Attar entertain a fantasy of himself as Esther Minna's lover? This question remains a mystery.

Near the end of the book we read Ben Attar's most bitter expression of anger toward his northern opponent. The southerners return to the home of Master Levitas after their treacherous journey back from Worms. Before Esther Minna notices the coffin of the second wife she greets Rabbi Elbaz with a smile. "*So you have returned?*"

At that, the North African merchant emerged from the recess where he had concealed himself...Before Esther Minna could draw back, he answered her question clearly: We have returned but not all of us. With an air of grim despair that contained a hint of lunatic glee, he hurled himself upon the coffin and pulled out one of the planks, to furnish clear proof that henceforth the old partnership could be revived without contravening any new edict...Ben Attar fixed his black eyes straight on the wide blue eyes and asked with utter hostility, *Is the new wife satisfied?* (Yehoshua 265)

This mixture of "grim despair" and "lunatic glee" depicts the dual nature of human emotion. After the burial of the second wife, Esther Minna knew "...she must try to soothe Ben Attar's feelings, for even the darkness of night could not conceal the hatred he felt toward her." (Yehoshua 267)

B. The intolerable bigamist

As for Esther Minna's feelings toward Ben Attar, she seems to be attracted to him the way people are attracted to the scene of a car accident. After the southerners settle into the home of their northern kin, Esther Minna "trembled at the sudden intimacy that the twice-wed partner had thus forced upon her..." (Yehoshua 99) After his victory in Villa Le Juif, Ben Attar

...smiled and bowed before her politely, as if to say, *Even though you have forced me to make this long journey, I forgive you.* She, however, could stand the man's proximity no longer. A wave of fear and disgust rose up inside her, her composure deserted her, and impatiently she left the room. (Yehoshua 99)

After making love to his first wife Ben Attar encounters Esther Minna sitting at the table. An awkward scene occurs.

Had she been able to, she would have made him too, wash his body, which smelled not only of the salty ocean but also of a heady reek of spices and animal skins. Moreover, from the soft, thick look that clouded his eyes, and perhaps also from the presence of a telltale stain on the edge of his robe, she was suddenly pierced, as by a painful knife thrust, by the knowledge that, having just made love on her own bridal couch, he was now roaming in search of his second wife, so as to prove to the mistress of the house that she was both misguided and ignorant. (Yehoshua 101-102)

She lowered her head and put her fist to her mouth in a childlike gesture. And the blue of her eyes shone in deep amazement, which made them sparkle like true sapphires among the fine wrinkles that adorned the corners of her eyes. As Ben Attar looked at her, he could feel her shudder with moral revulsion against him, but when he remembered what Abulafia had told him by the campfire in the Spanish March about the pleasure that he extracted from her, he said nothing except to ask her gently for the whereabouts of the second wife. (Yehoshua 102)

There is little evidence of positive feelings on her part. Tsemah claims that at times, Esther Minna "suspects but perhaps also wishes that 'Ben Attar might be unable to curb his desire and might leave the large wagon in the middle of the night and raise the flap of the smaller wagon, to seek love even from one who did not owe it to him.'" (Tsemah 29) However, the full quote reads, "Occasionally she was *alarmed* by the thought that Ben Attar might be unable to curb his desire..." (Yehoshua 168) (Italics are my own) Tsemah's claim that she "perhaps almost wishes" for this is an outrageous assumption. For most of the story, Esther Minna's revulsion outweighs any attraction she might have for her southern adversary.

C. A hidden fantasy?

Only at the end of the novel, upon Ben Attar's departure, do we learn about a "powerful new attraction."

In truth, a strange new attraction emanated from this woman toward the sorrowing uncle, the extinction of whose duality had left around him, or even within him, a new unclear space, like that left by the loss of a severed limb. There was not way of telling whether Esther Minna herself was in command, or was even aware, of the new quality emanating from her toward the uncle....

What precisely was the secret of this strange new attraction passing between the northern woman and the southern man, which was able to delay the moment of parting despite the impatience of the Ishmaelite seamen? The North African's enmity toward Abulafia's new wife still blazed within him, and if his young wife had not departed to what was supposed to be a better world, it would not have occurred to Ben Attar to withdraw from the campaign he had launched....

Thus the nature of the new attraction that joined the two adversaries was unclear. Surely it was not possible that now, on the brink of the departure from Europe and the parting of north from south, the mind should be expected to endure the mounting suspicion that the extended intimacy enforced upon these two who had traveled together

from Paris to Worms had kindled in one, or even perhaps both, a demented, forbidden fantasy, and the hope of realizing it was delaying the departure? (Yehoshua 292-293)

When Ben Attar finally boards the vessel, he is shocked to find that his Arab partner has installed "human cargo" in the ship's hold. Upon this discovery, "...he was pierced by the frightened, curious looks of three flaxen-haired, blue-eyed women shackled to each other by their long legs." (Yehoshua 306) The slaves look exactly like Esther Minna! Symbolically speaking, she has become Ben Attar's property. While he is disgusted by the thought of transporting slaves, one must wonder if this human cargo also fulfills his deepest fantasy. Does he see in their eyes the figure of his northern adversary shackled in defeat? Or does he see in their flaxen hair the image of Esther Minna chained to the mast for his pleasure? One is left with this disturbing, provocative image as testimony to the conflicted nature of their relationship.

IV. North vs. South

Journey to the End of the Millennium is not a story of one side over another.

Yehoshua presents a complex picture of *both* worlds. The narrative praises certain aspects of each culture while criticizing others. Yehoshua strives to reveal the many layers of a culture from communal norms to family relationships to intimacy between man and wife. One must recognize that Yehoshua examines all of these layers and thereby creates a story too complex to yield an absolute victory for either side.

A. A Clash of Cultures

In the year 999, Paris is a small village. The north is a frightening place where Abulafia must wear disguises to protect himself against thieves. The end of the millennium brings a religious fanaticism that threatens any non-believers. There are dark forests, heavy rains, and small alleys where Jews live. Jews are rigid in their adherence to the law in such a way that they cannot see beyond the words of the text. The first wife expresses herself there but dies as a result. The apothecary has become a heretic and young Elbaz becomes ill with guilt after eating pork in the small cottage where the pagan loses himself completely. The north is a terrifying place of uncertain identities, mortal danger, and zealous religiosity. Tsemah argues that the novel is not a blanket condemnation of the north, but it is hard to read it any other way.

The dispute between Ben Attar and Esther Minna presents an "either/or" scenario, but the fact that Ben Attar wins the first round while Esther Minna wins the second, proves that Yehoshua does not seek to present an "either/or" scenario regarding the clash of cultures between north and south.

For the most part, Journey to the End of the Millennium paints an enticing picture of a vibrant southern culture at the height of its glory. The sun shines over light, airy homes. Myriad spices lend color to the food and fragrance to the air. Ben Attar fills the hold of the ship with dried figs and dates, expensive fabrics and two camels that will bring the scent of the desert to the Jews of the north. Andalusia is home to great rabbis who write poetry and study philosophy. Muslims and Jews coexist and their cultures overlap. Finally, a commitment to family loyalty defines Ben Attar and provides one, if not the only, defining

factor in his decision to sail to Paris. Tsemah is correct, however, to point out that the novel does not express blanket approval of the south. With all its riches, southern culture also allows for polygamous marriages that, Yehoshua argues in the end, diminish the humanity of women.⁷

B. The nature of marriage

In the third section of the book Yehoshua reveals his greatest criticism of the south. Until then one's compassion is focused on Ben Attar and the injustice he has suffered as a result of the repudiation. However, during the trial in Worms, the second wife demands our sympathy when she reveals the loneliness of her existence. She tries to explain her desire for a man who understands her soul, but the arbiter misunderstands and recoils from what he imagines could be the beginning of an endless chain of sexual relationships.

The despair of the second wife reveals a criticism of polygamy as an arrangement that, by nature, prevents the development of an emotional, spiritual relationship between man and wife. However, Yehoshua does not stop there. Yes, monogamy offers the *possibility* of such a relationship, but it does not insure it. One need only examine the marriage of Abulafia to Esther Minna to understand that Yehoshua seeks to examine the more subtle layers of human relationships.

Abulafia's monogamous marriage to Esther Minna is a failure. While Ben Attar moves from room to room fulfilling his wives' sexual needs, we hear nothing of a sexual relationship between Abulafia and his northern wife. (Yehoshua 77) Only near the end do

⁷ For further discussion of this see Gilead Morahg, "Testing Tolerance: Cultural Diversity and National Unity

we learn that "even in moments of carnal intimacy seemed to have difficulty in looking straight at each other ever since the North African expedition had burst upon them.

(Yehoshua 271) It is as if knowledge of Ben Attar's sexual acts, forces her to recoil from her own sexual relationship.

Esther Minna is introduced as the "childless widow of a scholar." (Yehoshua 53)

Although she has been unable to procreate, surely a woman versed in halakhah knows that Jewish law does not confine sexual activity to the realm of procreation. Yehoshua names her "Esther Minna," one who hides from her sexuality. She is disgusted by the physicality of Ben Attar's dual marriage, but she provides no other model. In contrast to the details of her guests' sleeping arrangements, we hear nothing of the hosts' nocturnal whereabouts. It is as if it does not matter if Esther Minna and Abulafia retire to the same bed or not.

The emotional or spiritual bond between Abulafia and Esther Minna is difficult to find. Yehoshua describes the sense of comfort Abulafia felt when he first met Esther Minna in the darkness of a wayside inn. The widower shared the details of his life, revealing the pain of his daughter's condition and his wife's untimely death. "Here at last is somebody who gives rest to my soul, he had thought to himself as he inhaled the woman's unfamiliar scent, which he had not only become accustomed to but even begun to enjoy." (Yehoshua 54) However, after they are married we hear of no such compassion. In fact, Abulafia "had been drawn [to her] with a mixture of fear and strong desire ever since their wedding night." (Yehoshua 75)

When Esther Minna loses the first trial, she deals a devastating blow to her husband.

When she saw that Abulafia wanted to come in and undress, she dismissed her maid and stood before him in all her splendor before putting on the lightest shift she had. And while this curly headed man who was at once husband and nephew, victor and vanquished, began to remove his clothes, she told him in a voice only the depths of night could endow with such firmness that since the repudiation of the twice-wed uncle had failed and the partnership with him was about to be revived, she was declaring herself to be a rebellious wife who no longer desired her husband. According to a powerful and ancient law, whose source was not the rabbis of Ashkenaz but the heads of the Babylonian academies themselves, who were universally considered as unchallenged legal authorities, a rebellious wife who no longer desires her husband is compelled to submit to immediate divorce. (Yehoshua 149-150)

When Abulafia goes to the ship to stop the flow of merchandise into his brother-in-law's home, he faints just as his wife did a few days earlier. When he opens his eyes and sees his uncle's face above him, he expresses his despair. *"Uncle, if you cannot kill me, release me, for I shall never give up that woman."* (Yehoshua 159) Esther Minna has become nothing but a source of shattering turmoil to her husband.

C. Religious superiority

Yehoshua paints a bleak portrait of northern Jewry when he describes Abulafia's first meeting with Rabbi Kalonymous of Worms who has come to Paris to conduct the wedding ceremony of Abulafia and Esther Minna. When the rabbi arrived,

He sought first to test the nature and firmness of the southern bridegroom's faith, in case it required strengthening or completion, correction or purging, before it was joined to the unshakeable faith of the respectable woman from his home town....All this was meant to indicate to the Moroccan Jew that true faith requires meticulous preparation. Then he explained to the bridegroom the steps of the marriage ceremony in due order, lest any exotic desert whim or Mediterranean habit disrupt the sacrosanct ritual. (Yehoshua 74)

Shortly after the rabbi asserted his superiority over Abulafia, some pilgrims recognized that Kalonymous was a Jew and "pelted him with rotten apples as a first virtuous deed on their arduous journey..." (Yehoshua 75) Here Yehoshua takes aim at "religious" people whose devotion to God does not prevent them from denigrating others.

Master Levitas also provides a caricature of this community. When he notices his sister's apprehension regarding Rabbi Elbaz, he explodes with laughter.

What could an Andalusian rabbi say that could frighten her, the daughter and widow of famous scholars? Surely no exegetical sophistry, no well-known biblical tale, no ancient parchment could deflect a clear, new, right decree that was demanded by the circumstances and endorsed by great luminaries. (Yehoshua 95)

Northern Jews fail to apply their halakhah to the real world. They rely on books rather than critical analysis of a specific problem. Rabbi Elbaz is outraged when Master Levitas employs three scribes as judges because they know that which is found in books. Rabbi Elbaz demands new judges arguing that the scribes know what is found in books, but they have no training in its interpretation. The majority of the judges who are selected work as grape stampers in Villa Le Juif. They are completely uneducated and easily swayed by the confounding words of Rabbi Elbaz.

At the trial in Worms, Joseph son of Kalonymous at first appears to be a thoughtful, compassionate man. However, in the end, he too represents a man of extremes. When the second wife reveals her desire for a second husband, he assumes such an arrangement would lead to utter chaos that would, in turn, wreak havoc on the moral fabric of society. Rather

than try to understand the second wife as she attempts to explain herself, the rabbi drags her across the floor, forces her out of the synagogue and leaves her alone in the rain.

D. Dynamics of the Jewish People

Through the character of Abu Lutfi, Yehoshua mocks the dynamics of the Jewish people.

Abu Lutfi...would never, ever understand...why a Jewish merchant who lived with his wives and enjoyed the respect of Jews and Ishmaelites alike should care about the repudiation of faraway Jews living in dark forests on the shores of wild rivers, in the heart of a remote continent. (Yehoshua 124)

However, Ben Attar did care. When the Abu Lutfi learns of the impending trial in Worms, he does not argue with his Jewish partners because "he knew from experience that no Jew could truly get the better of another Jew but would only antagonize him..." (Yehoshua 163)

Upon Ben Attar's return, it seemed the Ishmaelite was not interested in the "fate of the expedition, or whether his Jewish partner had succeeded in trouncing his adversaries....for Jews by their nature are incapable of achieving a final and decisive judgment." (Yehoshua 262-263) One might ask whether the ongoing dispute in the novel unifies the two sides or drives them apart. This dual nature of ongoing debate continues to characterize the Jewish people today.

Conclusion: The Wrong Question

I agree with Tsemah that Yehoshua comes down on the side of monogamy, but not because of any void in Ben Attar's character or fulfillment in Esther Minna's life. Ben Attar does not need to be depressed or have his emotional needs unmet by his two wives in order

for the book to suggest that egalitarian bigamy is absurd. It is Ben Attar's wives who are unfulfilled. Not him. Esther Minna's character in no way proves the value of monogamy. She is manipulative and domineering. There is not a single scene in the book that portrays her marriage as an egalitarian partnership.

What does prove Yehoshua's point, is Ben Attar's two wives. One cannot survive bigamy and the other is transformed when she becomes Ben Attar's sole wife. Whereas Ben Attar and Esther Minna represent two extremes, the two wives represent the subtleties in between. It is they who dream of something different – a duality of soul. It is they who pronounce the final verdict.

Tsemah adds layers of complexity to Ben Attar and Esther Minna that are unfounded. Tsemah's psychoanalysis of Ben Attar attributes mental illness to a fairly simple man who intends to defend his honor and reunite his family. If he feels some attraction to Esther Minna it appears more sexual than psychological. As for Esther Minna, it is difficult to appreciate her as a modern woman. She lives in her brother's house, she reveres an halakhic system that is extremely paternalistic, and she is a cultural snob trapped in the darkness between the Rhine and the Seine.

Tsemah asks the wrong question though when he attempts to determine the victor among a sordid cast of characters. It is not a question of north vs. south, east vs. west. The story is a window into both worlds. The story is too complex to produce a clear victor. In fact, there is no champion at all. Everyone loses. Esther Minna wins the case in Worms, but it means nothing when the second wife dies. Esther Minna and Abulafia must live with the

guilt that the second wife is buried thousands of miles away from her home. The partnership is reinstated, but this too means nothing because Ben Attar and his crew apparently never arrive back in Tangiers. Abu Lutfi, the loyal Arab partner becomes a slave trader, Rabbi Elbaz is separated from his son, and the black pagan disappears in the abyss of unbridled sexuality. There are no winners in this tragic story.

Chapter Three: A Moral Divide

Summary of "Testing Tolerance: Cultural Diversity and National Unity in A.B.

Yehoshua's A Journey to the End of the Millennium" by Gilead Morahg translated from his original Hebrew essay "*Lo Sippur Yisraeli: Masa el Tom ha Elef*"

In an interview with Bernard Horn, Yehoshua asserts that this book "is very ideological, but not, of course, in the Israeli context.... With this new novel I am going back beyond Zionism, beyond all the modern issues, to try, if possible, to discover the unity of the Jewish people." (Horn 167) Gilead Morahg, a scholar of Hebrew Literature at the University of Wisconsin, explains that this search for unity gives structure to the novel as its focus narrows from cultural conflicts to family dynamics to sexual partnerships. As these layers are revealed, Yehoshua subtly passes judgement on the beliefs and behaviors of his characters.

Ben Attar is convinced that both his wives are perfectly satisfied with his dual marriage. He knows that according to Sephardic law, he has done nothing wrong. He has not violated the takanah of Rabbeinu Gershom, as it only applies to the Jews of Ashkenaz. Therefore, Esther Minna has no legal claim against him. Why then, does he risk his life to prove her wrong? Morahg contends that Ben Attar endangers his life and the lives of his shipmates for the sake of family unity, something he values above all else.

Yehoshua portrays Ben Attar as a simple man who holds a naïve view of what genuine unity demands. The aggrieved North African holds that unity merely requires

cultural tolerance. If only he can expose Esther Minna to his way of life, she will see for herself that he is an honorable husband. Ben Attar understood the need for compromise, yet he believed Esther Minna was the one who must concede her claim against him. In addition to the personal distress caused by Esther Minna's aversion, Ben Attar is troubled by the danger she poses on a national level. As Morahg explains:

Gradually, and with increasing force, it becomes evident to him that the partnership that is truly worthy of effort, compromise, and personal sacrifice is not his personal business partnership but rather a far more important national partnership: the partnership between communities that may be separated by distance, by custom, and by culture, but are bound to each other by force of their common Jewishness. (Morahg 237)

When Ben Attar and Rabbi Elbaz win in the first trial, the narrator relates the judges' reasons for voting in favor of the southern Jews. As for the oldest judge, "it was she who, with her inner sense, was convinced that the renewal of the partnership between north and south was the hidden desire of the entire community" (Yehoshua 148,140)

In the second trial Rabbi Elbaz connects the family rift to that between northern and southern Jews. Before the trial he insists that "judgement should be passed by a single magistrate, who will have on his conscience the blame for a final schism between uncle and nephew and between north and south." (Yehoshua 199, 192) During the trial the rabbi expresses his hope that the Rhenish judge will offer "an enlightened verdict that will allow the natural partnership to continue in honor of ancient solidarity and for the sake of future redemption." (Yehoshua 207, 201)

What is significant, of course, is that Elbaz's call for national solidarity based on mutual tolerance is not heeded. A ban against Ben Attar is proclaimed, and the partnership is dissolved. This development

indicates that while the distinguishing elements of tradition, ritual, a common language, and a deep sense of kinship are important constituents of national partnership, they may not be sufficient to sustain it. A key question that emerges from this narrative is whether there is a stronger, more elemental, foundation on which such a partnership can be made to endure.(Morahg 240)

Morahg goes on to argue that Yehoshua answers this question through the character of Esther Minna who sees the situation not as a cultural divide but rather as a *moral* divide. She does not mention the *takanah* of Rabbeinu Gershom in her testimony because she knows her dispute with Ben Attar is not one of legality but rather of moral standards. She cannot surrender her belief that polygamy degrades the humanity of women and is therefore immoral by nature.

The two trials illustrate the different perspectives of Ben Attar and Esther Minna. In the first trial, the court is made up of simple, naïve wine makers, who are easily confounded by Rabbi Elbaz's argumentation. In the end, they vote to reestablish the partnership in order to preserve the family's integrity. In the second trial, the sole arbiter is different from the emotionally driven wine makers. Joseph son of Kalonymous analyzes the case more carefully. He is also the *only* one who asks the two wives to speak. Each woman provides her testimony privately. The first wife offers no extra information, however, the testimony of the second wife ultimately decides the case.

The second wife reveals to Joseph son of Kalonymos that "not only was she willing to be *subjected* to dual wedlock, she herself wished to *contract* a dual marriage." (Yehoshua 216, 210) She had no complaint against the first wife. In fact she had come to appreciate her presence during the long journey. It was her husband whom she envied. He had two wives

to himself, but the women were forced to share one husband. The newly appointed judge interprets this to mean "that it was not *duality* that the second wife perceived as a threat but *singularity*." (Yehoshua 216, 211) Unable to restrain himself, he asks the second wife whom she might choose as a second husband. As he regrets his unnecessary question, the young woman responds, "Like you, my lord, like you, for instance..." (Yehoshua 216, 211)

This was a real arrow loosed against him, and it both pierced his soul with a strange desire and poisoned it with a new fear, as though it were now that he understood, on his own account, the profound source and the true meaning of the prohibition that the whole community was attempting to transmit to him from behind the curtain: *Duplication inevitably leads to multiplication, and multiplication has no limits.* (Yehoshua 216-217, 211)

Joseph son of Kalonymous assumes she expresses a *physical* desire for multiple partners.

Shocked by the idea of such an arrangement, he expands the repudiation to excommunication.

The following day the second wife enters the synagogue hoping to find Joseph son of Kalonymos to explain to her the true meaning of her candid testimony. She wanted him to understand

the nature and spirit of the counterduality that she claimed not only for herself but for women in general. For while a man demanded duality of body, a woman demanded duality of soul, even in the form of the tiny soul that was encased in her womb. (Yehoshua 223, 216)

But it was too late. The arbiter of her fate does not even try to understand her. He refuses to reconsider the judgement proclaimed the night before. He drags her outside and leaves her alone in the rain physically and emotionally wounded.

Like Esther Minna, Joseph son of Kalonymous judged the case on moral grounds discarding the argument for cultural tolerance. Whereas Elbaz defends polygamy as an antidote to male fantasies (Morahg 242), Joseph son of Kalonymous denounces it as a way for men to live out their fantasies. According to him, polygamy fans the flame of endless desire in men and women. Left unchecked, such desire would destroy the moral fabric of society.

Yehoshua evokes great sympathy for Ben Attar. However, in the end, the reader must question "whether the verdict passed against Ben Attar in Worms should be regarded as a legalistic travesty of cultural intolerance or as a moral act of humane judgement." (Morahg 243) Morahg argues that beyond what might be one's initial reaction to Ben Attar's defeat, Yehoshua is trying to show that there is a limit to cultural tolerance and that a lasting unity (in a family or a nation) must derive from a single moral code. According to this perspective, Esther Minna represents the ideal negotiator who refuses to compromise her moral stand.

Esther Minna builds her moral argument by projecting that Abulafia's first wife committed suicide because she feared the arrival of a second wife.

Esther Minna's reconstruction of Abulafia's wife's state of mind at the time of her suicide is questionable. But her interpretation is important because it is a reflection of her deepest convictions. It embodies a vision that contradicts the claims for the benign nature of polygamy and constitutes an ideological alternative to the argument that such practice must be tolerated for the sake of national unity. (Morahg 244)

Ben Attar believes himself to be a loving husband who devotedly fulfills the needs of his wives. The narrative, however, reveals a different reality, one that undermines this simplistic

view of married life. Morahg notes that Ben Attar rarely speaks with his wives. It is their sexual encounters that illustrate the nature of their relationships. Several scenes in the book suggest that these relationships were "driven more by pride of ownership and the obligations of husbandry than by true emotional engagement or a genuine concern with how these women actually feel." (Morahg 244)

Although she rarely speaks, the second wife expresses her pain with her eyes. At the beginning of the book the second wife spends most of the night waiting for Ben Attar to come. When he finally arrives, her eyes were "fin-shaped and bloodshot from a long sleepless night, like the eyes of a predatory animal that has just been trapped." (Yehoshua 29,18) Somewhat later, when she realizes that her husband's primary concern is with the fate of his business partnership, which has been jeopardized by his marriage to her, "a venomous spark ignites her fine amber eyes...and they open wide with the force of her affront." (Yehoshua 33, 22) In Esther Minna's house, Ben Attar relentlessly awakens the second wife in order to prove to his hostess that he has the strength to satisfy both of his wives. The first wife has even less of a voice. However, we do see a glimpse of her inner world when late in the journey she is seen "weeping silently in the bowels of the ship, yearning for love." (Yehoshua 287, 280)

Morahg compares Esther Minna to Ben Attar's two unnamed wives. At first she appears quite different from them. Stubborn and outspoken, she represents a "new woman."

Yet although Esther-Minna's character constitutes an antithesis to the submissive pliancy of Ben Attar's wives, she is not unlike them in the anger and the anguish that she feels at the prospect of having to share her husband with another wife. The fear that, as a result of his

ongoing partnership with his uncle, Abulafia will revert to the marriage customs of the south underlies Esther Minna's determination to sever the connection with Ben Attar. She has an acute sense of the emotional deprivations and painful indignities caused to women in polygamous marriages and is determined not to subject herself to them. (Morahg 245)

When the court of Villa Le Juif nullifies the ban, Esther Minna refuses to capitulate.

Defying her brother, who was prepared to accept the verdict, Esther Minna disavows the partnership by proclaiming herself "a rebellious wife who no longer wants her husband" (Yehoshua 158, 150). By placing the value of her individual dignity above the cause of familial and communal affinity, Esther-Minna draws the moral line that separates her position from that of Ben Attar and connects the novel's concern with the sources of national unity to fundamental questions of morality. (Morahg 246)

The following quote expresses the essence of Morahg's interpretation of Esther Minna as a feminist champion rather than an intolerant and destructive woman.

In clear opposition to Elbaz's ethos of total inclusion, Esther-Minna advocates placing a clear limit on tolerance and excluding any cultural practice in which the desire of some members of the community dominates and diminishes the humanity and the dignity of others. (Morahg 246)

After the death of his second wife, Ben Attar promises never to take another wife in exchange for the reestablishment of the partnership.

A key question at this juncture is whether Ben Attar's concession signifies an affirmation of a superior moral code or a critique of the self-righteous imposition of one cultural code upon another. On this matter, Ben Attar remains ambivalent to the end. The view that emerges from the narrative as a whole is much less equivocal. It repeatedly shows desire as being inherently self-centered and the fantasies it engenders as leading to actions that have little regard for others. (Morahg 247-248)

The first wife realizes the pain inflicted by such self-centered desire when her husband begins to make love to her for the first time after the death of the second wife. As his passion increases, she senses that "the urgency of his desire stems not only from his love for her, but also from a fantasy of recapturing the presence of the dead wife in the body of the living one." (Morahg 248) Although she encourages him to wait, he forces himself upon her. As a result, "...she feels, for the first time since she became a woman, an aversion to her husband, as if the difficult journey she had made...transformed her, too, into a new woman." (Yehoshua 290, 282)

Yehoshua employs a simultaneous scene to exaggerate the danger of unrestricted passion. The pagan returns to the cottage out of a desire to bow down "not before images of others but before the image of himself." (Morahg 249) In bowing down to his own desire, he exposes himself to the ravenous appetites of the three women who pass him around from one to the other. Soon the pagan's pleasure becomes "infused with sorrow and pain." (Yehoshua 297,298)

Morahg puts the final nail in the coffin of the "cultural intolerance interpretation" when he explains that:

By universalizing the destructive force of indiscriminate desire, it also affirms that Esther-Minna's aversion to southern conventions of marriage is not to be regarded as a biased rejection of a foreign custom, but rather as an effort to confront a profound moral challenge. (Morahg 250)

However, whereas the scene with the pagan ends in despair, Ben Attar realizes the sin of his selfish behavior.

Is this the merging that I so desire, Ben Attar thinks in horrified despair and disappointment at the seed that was spent in vain into the darkness of the cabin. Because if it is, then it is not a merging but a punishment, which I seek to inflict not only upon myself, but also upon the one who remains with me. (Yehoshua 295, 287)

Ben Attar then embraces his wife seeking her compassion and she accepts his tears as a true outpouring of grief over the second wife. With her humanity, the first wife relates "the message of the single wife, who does not want the man's fantasy or the spirit of his imagination, but only his reality and his love." (Yehoshua 296,288) In the morning, while the pagan lies among graven images, Ben Attar awakens to the affection of his wife as they join in a sexual act of mutuality and love. The contrast of these two portraits exaggerates the need for a universal moral code.

Morahg argues that by the end of the novel, Ben Attar and Esther Minna agree upon the same moral code, namely a code that honors the dignity of every person rather than a code that indulges the fantasies of some while silencing others. In the end, Yehoshua teaches that moral standards must never be subverted for the sake of unity. A lasting partnership can only be achieved when adversaries agree to the same moral code. Until then, unity must wait.

Morahg ends with the following commentary on the modern conflicts among the Jewish people. He states, "[I]t may well be that the narrative's underlying concern with national unity stems not from the diversity of the ethnic communities that make up the Israeli partnership, but from the fervors of the ideological communities that are in deep conflict within it." (Morahg 254) To summarize, according to Morahg, A Journey to the

End of the Millennium is not merely a chronicle of cultural conflict but rather a portrayal of disparate moral codes. Yehoshua's latest work then becomes an allegorical tale that seeks to promote a national moral code in Israel and among the Jewish people.

Reaction to Gilead Morahg

My primary reaction to Morahg is one of sheer wonder at his ability to impose a structure upon such a complex story. The foundation of this structure is a statement made by Yehoshua himself. In an interview with Bernard Horn, Yehoshua explains, "With this new novel I am going back beyond Zionism, beyond all the modern issues, to try, if possible, to discover the unity of the Jewish people." (Horn 167) After setting the foundation, Morahg seeks to identify the various layers within the story. The novel then becomes a commentary on the forces that encourage or prohibit unity within a marriage, a family or an entire people. Each event is then refracted through the story's many layers. The power struggles within the Jewish people are played out in Ben Attar's sexual relationships. The repudiation becomes a metaphor for an unequivocal moral standard regarding women and anyone else whose voice is unheard. In the end, the pagan represents the dehumanization that comes with unbridled desire.

Morahg presents a convincing thesis as to Yehoshua's intended message. He interprets each event as one layer in a greater structure of enormous integrity. The pieces fit. Morahg provides the only suitable explanation for the bizarre orgy scene involving the pagan and the three women. In contrast to the love-making taking place in the hold of the ship, the pagan's ordeal exposes a message that until then was not completely clear. However, once Morahg situates these scenes within his structure, they become the climax of the story. Simultaneously, they reveal Yehoshua's verdict against polygamy, and in a larger context, against any practice that diminishes the humanity of oneself or others.

Although I am convinced of the moral nature of Yehoshua's narrative, I am not persuaded that Esther Minna is the one who communicates a moral message. Moragh claims, "She has an acute sense of the emotional deprivations and painful indignities caused to women in polygamous marriages and is determined not to subject herself to them." (245) Moragh attributes a pathos to Esther Minna that I do not recognize. I do not view Esther Minna as a feminist hero. She shows no sign of solidarity with her southern aunts. Her marriage to Abulafia lacks passion, compassion and dialogue. Finally, regardless of the moral fervor Moragh assigns to her, she is a cultural snob.

Esther Minna is not concerned for all women. She is concerned for herself and her marriage to Abulafia. Moragh claims that Esther Minna's determination to sever the partnership arose from her fear that, as a result of his ongoing relationship with his uncle, Abulafia might revert to the marriage customs of the south. (245) However, it is unlikely that Esther Minna would have felt such fears. First, she knows how long it took Abulafia to find a new wife after the tragic death of his first love. She had no reason to think he was interested in marrying an additional woman. Second, the only contact Abulafia had with his uncle was in the Bay of Barcelona. He would not be in Tangier surrounded by the culture of his youth. Third, she could have secured a promise from Abulafia not to take a second wife without passing judgement against Ben Attar. Abulafia would probably not even be allowed to contract a dual marriage while living in a land subjected to the edict of Rabbeinu Gershom. The truth, as Shlomit Almog argues in following essay, is that Esther Minna did not want Abulafia to be away from home for long periods of time. Although this sounds like an acceptable goal, her character is marred by the manipulative strategy she employs to attain it.

Morahg asserts that Ben Attar and Esther Minna are able to reconcile their opposing views only after excruciating loss. The partnership between north and south is only reinstated because the second wife dies. This tragic event brings a cease-fire as both parties surrender under the burden of grief and guilt. The death of the second wife poses a haunting series of questions. Does tragedy create unity? Must we wait for disastrous events to draw us closer to our adversaries? If tragedy does create new relationships, will these relationships last once the shock has dissipated? The narrative suggests a bleak response.

The last line of the novel implies that the ship never reaches Tangier. We are left to assume that Ben Attar, the first wife, Rabbi Elbaz, Abu Lutfi, Abd al-Shafi, Abulafia's daughter, the northern slaves and the rest of the crew disappear in the waves of the Atlantic. The automatic interpretation, rejected by Tsemah, would interpret this as a metaphor for Sephardic culture that declined under the growing hegemony of Ashkenazic Jewry. This is especially true in Israel where Ashkenazim constitute society's elite.

Morahg does not comment on the impending tragedy. Therefore, we are left to determine its meaning within the structure he provides. Such an ominous ending forces us to question whether some rifts are irreparable. To respond, Yehoshua leaves us with the words of Shmuel HaNagid creatively attributed to Rabbi Elbaz. "Is there a sea between us, that I should not turn aside to visit the..." (Yehoshua 309) Is this an expression of hope and devotion or a mournful acceptance of permanent separation? Most likely, it implies both.

Chapter Four: The Female Perspective

Translation of "*Keshel HaMishpat k'Kishlon HaMasa*" by Shlomit Almog (Part B)

Masot al Tom HaElef pp. 188-193

"Failure of the Law as The Failure of the Journey"

Part B

One of the central claims in feminist legal discourse is the systematic absence of the female perspective from the legal arena. According to this claim, the law is determined, interpreted and changes according to the male point of view without regard for the female voice or by assimilating or blurring it within the male perspective. This claim is very often illustrated by means of literary works.

A Journey to the End of the Millennium, too, illustrates well how the legislation was set and interpreted and how the law was decided while silencing the female voice. In the opening of the journey it seems that the state of things is not like this. The need for a legal discussion on the subject of polygamy, a subject that directly pertains to the comfort and the rights of women, arises because of the stubbornness of a woman: the "aversion" of Esther-Minna. Esther-Minna herself constitutes, ostensibly, a prominent deviation from the female landscape described in the book. She is the only woman who merits a name. The men in the book – Ben Attar, Abulafia, Abu Lutfi, Abd al-Shafi, Rabbi Elbaz, the sage Ghiyyat, Yehiel Levinas, Joseph son of Kolonymos and similarly many additional men – they are all cited (referenced) by their names. In contrast to them, the women are left without names, and sometimes without faces. They are identified by means of a "label" that defines their

legal, property-like relationship to some man. The "first wife" and the "second wife" of Ben Attar, the dead wife of Abulafia, the wretched daughter of Abulafia and the like. The only woman who is mentioned by her name is, as was said before, Esther-Minna.

In addition, as to Esther-Minna's personality, she also stands out in her assertiveness. Most of the other women are depicted as deprived of a will of their own. Ben Attar's wives are transported (led about) by their husband as if they were part of his baggage. He decides to take them on the ship with the assumption that their presence will serve his interest – the renewal of the partnership. When his hope is disappointed (frustrated, dashed) on this matter, he hurries to gather his wives – together with the rest of his cargo – and set out immediately on the way, without consulting them, without trying to trace (follow up on, check up on) their feelings or thoughts in the wake of the stormy events, and without considering their comfort.

Esther-Minna, in contrast to this, insists on the fulfillment of her demand for the canceling of the partnership between her intended husband and Ben Attar before she will agree to the marriage. She suggests a bold and surprising proposal – the participation of women in the composition of the first court. After the defeat she suffers at the hands of this composition, she reacts with resolve and obstinacy and decrees herself a rebellious wife. However, a more probing scrutiny raises doubts about Esther-Minna's feminist characteristics, for indeed the reason she recoils from polygamy with a ban is nothing other than "a clear, new, right decree that was demanded by the circumstances and endorsed by great luminaries." (103, 95) "...[A] new rabbinical ordinance, stern but simple, which even

though it had originated in the marshy swamps of the Rhineland was destined to enlighten and reform society everywhere." (137, 130)

In the course of the first trial, Esther-Minna reveals before the court an emotional source for her aversion, that it is in her eyes, as she says, even more important than the sages' edict: the hypothesis that came to her regarding the relationship between the suicide of Abulafia's first wife and that same woman's fear that her husband would take a second wife. She tries to plant the reason for her opposition to polygamy within her desire to avenge [the death of] that same woman. However, it seems that Esther-Minna's "confession" is a meticulously calculated rhetorical ploy, the goal of which is to constitute an adequate reply to Ben Attar's personal and emotional confession in the ears of the assembly of male and female judges. More than the words express a true and painful inner feeling, they express a "faint hint of shrewdness," (135, 127) a definition [offered by] her brother. One must also remember that these words are heard for the first time at the trial, another detail that raises doubts about their sincerity. Esther-Minna never raised her feelings on the subject with her husband, and the surprised Abulafia never imagined that his new wife was engaged in the enigma his first wife's drowning.

The same "sophistic argument" (137, 130)⁸ as was the feeling of Master Levitas, or her "virulent speech" (137, 128) as was the feeling of Ben Attar, is left as the sole reason for the aversion given by Esther-Minna, and beyond this reason and beyond the fulfillment of the edict, she does not try to locate the aversion in any ideological context whatsoever, and although the true emotional background – her desire to protect her late marriage from the

⁸ English translation says "subtleties."

wanderings (excessive traveling away from home) of her husband – arises from the story, the clear feeling is that the central reason for Esther-Minna's repudiation is, in effect, disrespectful of the takanah. (religious edict)

The aversion is based (lit. planted) on her husband Abulafia's non-recognition of the source of the authority accepted by her. The source of this authority is purely masculine – the scholars from Worms that instituted the takkanah by virtue (dint, power) of the authority vested in them by generations of scholars who preceded them. Just as it was explained to the intended groom, Abulafia, by R. Kalonymous son of Kalonymous of Worms, who arrived before the wedding as a representative of the male authority that sees itself as appointed over Esther-Minna: "Dead scholars, who watched over living scholars, who in their turn were preparing the world for future generations of scholars still unborn." (82, 75) These scholars are the source of authority to which Esther-Minna views herself as bound. Therefore she agrees with the suggestion of Rabbi Elbaz to conduct an additional trial in Worms, and [she] agrees to accept upon herself, this time in an absolute way, the results of the additional deliberation, even if they do not find favor in her eyes. It turns out that even the image of the only heroine with deviant characteristics, is the same as the rest of the women in the book in her absolute subservience to a male legal authority. Let us study the way in which the book describes the legal attitude toward the status of women on the issue that stands at the heart of things – the issue of polygamy. The central claim that Rabbi Elbaz makes heard in the first trial is this:

For the second wife, the rabbi went on to declare confidently, always exists. If she does not exist in reality, she exists in the imagination. Therefore no rabbinical edict is able to eradicate her. But because she exists only in the man's imagination, she is good, fair, submissive, wise, and pleasant, according to his fancy, and however hard his only real wife tries, she can never truly rival the

imaginary one, and therefore she will always know anger and disappointment. However, when the second wife is not imaginary but exists in flesh and blood, the first wife can measure herself against her, and outdo her, and sometimes she can make her peace with her and, if she wishes, even love her. (141, 134)

Ostensibly Rabbi Elbaz turns, in order to justify polygamy, to the perspective of the woman. He tries to penetrate the collective female consciousness and from within arrive at the conclusion that polygamy serves the interest of women. But this is only apparently. In effect, the manner of argumentation of Rabbi Elbaz emphasizes and radicalizes the male domination of the female perspective in order to interpret the legal norm. Rabbi Elbaz establishes as a fact that needs no proof that the psychological situation that characterizes married men is a yearning for an additional wife, and that in the imagination of women, by contrast, there exists anxiety and persistent dread from this yearning of men. Other possibilities do not occur to Rabbi Elbaz. (do not come to his mind.) He does not imagine that it is also possible that in the imagination of women there exists a second husband or another man. It does not occur to him according to the logic of the words he presented, [that] it is suitable to allow women also to marry a second husband in order to assist the first husband to overcome his fears regarding the imaginary husband. Rabbi Elbaz is described as someone who sincerely believes that his arguments are directed toward the welfare of women. Even after his defeat he continues to think of the arguments he raised as statements that he raised⁹ "for the sake and the benefit of" (312, 303) the second wife who died, and he is prepared to argue them at any time if he is asked to go out to an additional legal battle "for the sake of a second second wife." (312, 303) With this kind of faith of Rabbi Elbaz, one cannot blur the paternalistic and power-driven manner with which he

⁹ The author uses the Hebrew root: *nun sin qyin* to mean "raise." This root also means "marry." With the argument he raises, Rabbi Elbaz attributes to himself superior knowledge of the dynamics he claims exist within every marriage.

attributes to himself a way of seeing and understanding that which occurs in the souls of women.

In the first trial, the rhetoric of Rabbi Elbaz - which especially "enchanted" the women who participated in the assembly - wins him a victory. This trial was directed and decided therefore while ignoring or missing the point of the female perspective. Let us now turn our view to the second trial. Ostensibly, it seems that they do not ignore the female point of view. The arbitrator, Reb Kalonymous, in a surprising step, decides to interrogate Ben Attar's two wives in order to clarify their position. He even decides to question them one on one (in the presence of a translator only) so that the possibility of receiving truthful responses from them will increase. The first wife, very restrained and reticent in her speech, expresses complete approval of polygamy. It is, of course, difficult to know if we are talking about true approval, or approval that stems from compulsion (duress). The question of the true nature of female consent to the portrayal of the social situation and to the status that they are in, this is one of the central questions in current feminist legal discourse. Do female "consents," in all their various forms, reflect a free choice, made by autonomous people, liberated from limitations and from external coercion, or perhaps we are talking about agreements (consents) that constitute a kind of defensive strategy.

One way, with the help of which, women deal with the situation of continuing inferiority and subordination to male demands is their presenting of themselves as those who agree of their own will to be in this situation. It is so in our day, and it was this way with even greater intensity in the year one thousand.

The reserved caution of the first wife is proved justified, in light of the events that followed (the next occurrences). The second wife is not cautious. She reveals, without inhibitions and without reservations, her true inner point of view. She is prepared to be doubled, but she also wants to be a doubler. "...[S]he was experiencing a mounting envy of a husband who had two wives to himself while they only had one husband between them...." (216, 210) To the question of the arbiter, "*Like whom? For example?*" She answers, "*Like you, my lord, like you, for instance....*" (216, 211) However, exposure of the real female voice, it turns out, exacts a heavy price.

Immediately after the giving of the verdict the second wife's heart sinks with terror. She torments herself severely because she was persuaded to open her heart of hearts. She tries to return and speak with the arbitrator, even though the verdict had already been given, and to assuage his spirit by explaining her feelings to him in greater detail: men seek duality of body, but she, when she spoke of duality, she meant a duality of soul. The arbitrator refuses to even listen to her words. He gets rid of her by force. She is silenced with actual violence: Kalonymous does not "even try to begin to understand what the second wife was attempting to say to him in her Ishmaelite tongue..." (223, 216) He pushes her and dismisses her from the bima, and horror-stricken, he drags her with force outside the synagogue, into the back yard of an old stable, and leaves her there "without regret or understanding" on his part. (224, 217) In despair the second wife flees and enters a dark space for hours. She understands that she is silenced forever. Since he who "should have listened to her instead of hurting her," (223,230) betrayed his obligation, "To whom could she now say what would never be understood?" (223, 230) "She kept her mouth firmly

closed" (223, 230) and refuses not only to speak but also to eat. With her death, which occurs a few days after this, the attempt to give expression to the true female perspective (feeling) is ended.

On the back of the book, the editor Menahem Peri writes: "Toward the end of the journey it becomes clear that the control and the (male) ownership is replaced with a partnership of full equality, the authority loses its effectiveness, (and) the female voice achieves (receives) range and depth." However, this is not the way things are. At the end of the journey, just like at the beginning, male dominance is absolute. Ben Attar, who for his own needs and his own comfort took with him a cargo of two wives, returned with one wife. If he wants, he can always take a second wife for himself again and easily fill the void of the wife that was lost on the way. The first wife, the submissive, quiet one who stifles her voice in her throat, will certainly not stand in his way; her true feelings will be what they will be. He returns to Tangier even more convinced in the justness of his original position.

A legal victory is indeed noted to Esther-Minna's credit, however, the second verdict that was received is not a victory for her private position but rather a victory for those same scholars dead and alive, the source of male authority that, because of her submission to it, she conducted the conflict. This source of authority has not changed one bit in its effectiveness. Whereas, from a personal vantage point, Esther-Minna suffered a defeat. The [business] partnership she despises was established again, and her marriage is threatened. No partnership of equality was created, and the female voice did not gain strength or volume. The only woman who tried to give this voice real significance and depth – the anonymous second wife – was silenced with brutality and paid with her life.

In the final analysis the femininity that comes out of the book is passive and stifled. The women, including Esther-Minna, are depicted as objects reflected through the desires, the needs, and the preferences of men. It is in accordance with this, that the obligatory legal norms are also set and interpreted. Similarly, in the communities of the north, which maintain the norm that today we consider more enlightened, the real reason for the prohibition of polygamy is not for the honor of women and respect for their desires or protection of their feelings but rather, as it becomes clear to the arbitrator Kalonymous, the desire to avoid crossing (breaking through) boundaries. "Multiplication has not limits," (217, 211) and the crossing of boundaries occurs the minute a woman dares to externalize feelings of complete equality to men. "...[T]he profound source and the true meaning..." (216, 211) of the new edict is therefore the need to place boundaries on the female imagination, to block the bursting out of the female voice, and the crossing of boundaries that were designed by men.

It is possible that the halakhic trial, which is the trial described in the book, radicalizes the characterization of the trial as a phenomenon that silences the female voice (although the halakhic rule described in the book greatly "softens" the halakhic rule that was in effect in the year 1000, and even the halakhic legislation in effect today.) However, the argument, according to which, the law was set, changed and explicated from a male point of view that "swallowed" the female one within it, this is an argument that relates to the whole system of law, in all times. It is even relevant to the contemporary legal system [which is] apparently democratic and pluralistic. In this context Journey to the End of the Millennium depicts a phenomenon that is in no way unique to the contemporary or historical Jewish legal system.

Reaction to Shlomit Almog

Of the essays I read, Almog is the only one who does not praise Esther Minna as a "new woman." Instead she compares her to Ben Attar's wives. All three women are subjected to legal systems that were created, interpreted, and imposed by men. Just because Esther Minna has a name and a voice does not mean she has a "say" in the legal system to which she considers herself bound. Almog does not portray Esther Minna as a "modern woman." Instead she is a narrow-minded woman who argues for the infallibility of an inherently patriarchal legal system.

Nothing that Esther Minna says portrays her as a feminist. In Villa LeJuif she expresses her desire to avenge the death of Abulafia's first wife. She shocks her husband when she uncovers the secret behind his first wife's suicide. At the risk of inflicting great pain upon her husband, Esther Minna explains that his first wife drowned herself in the sea because she was afraid that Abulafia would take a second wife. Her testimony sounds manipulative and cruel. This is the extent of her argument. As Almog states, "...beyond this reason and beyond the fulfillment of the edict, she does not try to locate the aversion in any ideological context whatsoever...." (Almog 189) Rather than giving voice to the fears of a woman she never met, it is more likely that Esther Minna was expressing her own fears. She did not want her young husband to meet other women on his business travels. She is a woman desperate to protect herself, regardless of the damage she might inflict on others.

Almog suggests a more complex reason for the repudiation. She claims that Esther Minna wanted Abulafia to accept the authority of the Ashkenazic sages. It is clear that

Master Levitas requires this when he hires a rabbi from Worms to "interview" Abulafia before Master Levitas will allow his sister to marry him. It is also clear that Esther Minna takes her halakhic responsibilities very seriously. However, it is not clear that there is an issue between Abulafia and Esther Minna regarding his relationship to the Ashkenazic authorities at the time. There is no reason to believe Abulafia is unwilling to obey the takanah of Rabbeinu Gershom. If he had articulated a willingness to abide by the new edict, it would not have changed anything in his life. However, it would not have severed the partnership either. In order to accomplish this, Esther Minna had to repudiate Ben Attar.

I do not agree with Almog's assertion that Esther Minna issued the repudiation because she wanted Abulafia to accept the authority of Ashkenazic sages. Abulafia already accepted their authority when he agreed to be married by the Rabbi from Worms. Esther Minna has no right to require the same of Ben Attar, and Abulafia knows this. Abulafia would never ask his uncle to follow any rabbis other than those of Andalusia. Therefore Abulafia's acceptance of Ashkenazic authority has no bearing on his partnership with Ben Attar.

Almog portrays Rabbi Elbaz as sincere but mistaken in his depiction of the female perspective. It is indeed ironic that a male figure attempts to speak for all women. Ironically, his testimony depicts men as the weaker gender. "Rabbi Elbaz establishes as a fact that needs no proof that the psychological situation that characterizes married men is a yearning for an additional wife, and that in the imagination of women, by contrast, there exists anxiety and persistent dread from this yearning of men." (Almog 190) It does not occur to him that a woman might dream of another, more perfect husband and that her

fantasies might be assuaged if she were allowed two husbands. Almog cautions that despite his sincerity, "...one cannot blur the paternalistic and power-driven manner with which he attributes to himself a way of seeing and understanding that which occurs in the souls of women." (Almog 191)

I agree with Almog's criticisms of Esther Minna and Rabbi Elbaz. Neither of them present "the" female perspective. Esther Minna is so afraid to express her own fears that she crafts a perspective and attributes it to a woman long dead. Rabbi Elbaz thinks he can represent the female perspective. However, he starts with an assumption about *men* and extrapolates from that what he considers to be the only possible female response. In the end it is, as Almog argues, the second wife who reveals a true female perspective, and for this she suffers immeasurably.

Like Tsemah and Morahg, Almog feels impelled to define the victor. However, this betrays the complexity of the narrative. Almog is correct that "No partnership of equality was created, and the female voice did not gain strength or volume." (Almog 192) Even at the end of the book, one cannot know if the first wife's relationship with Ben Attar would have changed if they survived. Esther Minna's voice loses strength. By the end, she barely speaks. The second wife speaks to one person who did not understand her. On the other hand, I disagree with Almog in her depiction of Ben Attar as the victor. She states that "[h]e returns to Tangier even more convinced in the justness of his original position." (Almog 192) Almog fails to support this claim. The end of the book is so compelling precisely because it is ambiguous. We do not know what Ben Attar thinks. We know that he is grief stricken and overwhelmed by guilt. We also know that he and everyone else on the ship

disappear in the ocean. This makes only one thing clear – there are no victors in this tragic story.

Almog refers to the “halakhic trial,” but it is not a legal battle. It is a manipulative ploy on the part of Esther Minna to keep her husband at home. She uses the argument against polygamy because she believes her community will support her, but as stated earlier, she has no real legal recourse as the Ashkenazic sages have no authority over a Jew from Tangier. Esther Minna expresses an aversion to polygamy when she describes the pain caused to Abulafia’s first wife by the possibility of a dual marriage. However, it is difficult to accept this as a moral claim. The fact that Esther Minna had never discussed her thoughts with Abulafia suggests her motives were less than altruistic. Rather than reveal the feelings of a woman she never knew, her testimony reveals her own apprehension. She did not fear polygamy. She feared adultery, and she equated the two. According to Morahg, with whom I agree, Yehoshua also equates them. However this does not mean that Esther Minna is the champion of this message. She was doing everything she could to protect her own marriage. It is the second wife who reveals Yehoshua’s true message.

Overall, I agree with Almog’s criticisms of Esther Minna and Rabbi Elbaz. I appreciate her warning regarding the complexity of a woman’s consent. I do not agree, however, with her attempt to portray Ben Attar as the victor. In the end, the story is egalitarian in its allocation of tragedy to all parties.

Chapter Five: The Need for Dialogue

Translation of "*L'Ayin b'Rosh Sika*" by A.B. Yehoshua

Masot al Tom HaElef pp. 224-230

"To Study the Head of a Pin"¹⁰

I belong to those who still believe it is possible to learn from history. Indeed there are honored historians who warn us from drawing direct conclusions from the past regarding the present. Perhaps, specifically because their knowledge of the past is filled with details and details of details, they are weary of simple reconstructions, and advise us to judge the present according to its data and not according to formulas from the past. But there are, of course, also other historians, who are prodigious in showing how specific patterns repeatedly reconstruct themselves, how geopolitical systems repeatedly influence (tilt) the fate of nations either negatively or positively. How oppressive problems of identity are carried forth, unsolved from century to century.

¹⁰ This title refers to a question posed by William Faulkner, one of Yehoshua's greatest role models. Faulkner asked why the author should attempt to put "the whole history of the human heart on the head of a pin?" In response he explained, "We tried to crowd and cram everything into each paragraph, to get the whole complete nuance of the moment's experience...." Faulkner used long sentences filled with detail in his attempt "to put the whole universe of the human soul on the pinhead ...of the historical split second of man's individual existence." In *A Journey to the End of the Millennium*, Yehoshua too fills each moment with detail, creating an entire universe contained in an instant. Sergei Chakovsky, "The Whole History of the Human Heart on the Head of a Pin': Toward Faulkner's Philosophy of Composition," in *Russian Eyes on American Literature*, ed. Sergei Chakovsky and M. Thomas Inge (Jackson, MS: University Press of MS, 1992).

As a member of a people who was mortally smitten in its history, and especially in the last century, I cannot allow myself to disregard Jewish history, even if it were possible to disregard it. A history so problematic and complicated obligates (one) to return and to study it (turn it over and over) and (it) especially obliges those who pretend to emend and change some of the outdated (defected) codes within it. Regarding Mar Mani, which is a kind of historical novel, I thought of it after the war in Lebanon. Suddenly it seemed to me that I no longer understood the Israeli codes (of behavior) which until then, I thought I knew in their good and bad aspects. When I heard on the first day of the war in the district headquarters of the chief educational officer, (about) the objective of the war (to reach [as far as] Beirut, ally ourselves with the Christians and change the internal regime of Lebanon in order to arrive at a peace agreement with it), I felt like someone who suddenly discovers the insanity of a dear family relative, and because he does not succeed in understanding the sources of this madness according to present data, he looks to the past, layer after layer, until he might reveal the source. This was the manner in which Mar Mani was constructed. I tied a rope to a crazy peg in the present and by means of this rope, I began to descend layer after layer in the opposite direction until the springtime of nations of 1848.

In the novel A Journey to the End of the Millennium I dispensed with the rope attached to the present and I dove freely into the depths of Jewish history. The proximity to the end of the second millennium (awakened the heart) prompted the turn back to the end of the first millennium, a period of great importance in the history of our people – the waning of the center of spiritual authority in Babylonia and the beginning of the split between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, or between Jews who lived in Muslim lands, comprising the majority of the Jewish people, and the Jews living in Christian lands, who

comprised a small minority. At the end of the first millennium two new centers began to flourish; the North African Sephardic center that led to its golden age, with its wonderful symbiosis with Arab-Christian culture of Andalusia. And in parallel fashion, the sages of Ashkenaz with their strong halakhic authority that developed near the Rhine River.

In this novel, too, I again connect with a subject that has bothered me lately - the connecting seam between east and west, or in the conceptual language of today - the tension and the struggle between north and south, which in my eyes, is going to be one of the most difficult struggles for the world in its entirety in the next century. Mistaken are they who think I write about the Mizrahi (oriental or sephardic) Jew. I know very little about the Mizrahi Jew. What truly interests me is the interaction between east and west. Not only because the Israeliness of myself and of many of us is a compound of these two codes but also because as a collective, as a state, we are situated on the border of the east. And one of the greatest questions of peace will be the question of our identity on this side of the border.

The dialogue or the confrontation between south and north in the novel A Journey to the End of the Millennium, I sought to create by way of the other aspect of my personal "*mizrachiut*" (Eastern/Sephardic heritage), via my mother's side and not my father's. My mother arrived in the land of Israel with her father, Avraham Rozilio, a wealthy merchant from the city of Mogador on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean who was seized by a strange Zionist impulse in the early thirties and immigrated to the land of Israel. I say a strange Zionist impulse because my grandfather certainly did not suffer from anti-semitism in colonial Morocco of the early twentieth century. Few were those people in Morocco who made aliyah at that time to the incipient state (that was forming.) He was an older man, well-

to-do, religious in the traditional sense of the word, and most of his children had their own families. And here, at the time when a man seeks tranquility and amusement with his grandchildren, he decides to leave his fortune and his flourishing business, and to leave with his wife for the land of Israel. However, his wife died suddenly before the trip while their luggage lay in the rooms. And he, broken and pained by his beloved wife's death, decides to fulfill his oath and go to Israel despite everything. He distributes his great fortune among his children and took his two adolescent, unmarried children with him and came to settle in Israel during the Mandate period. Here he married off his two daughters to young Sephardi men from the old Yishuv. He died a few years after making aliyah, a few months before my birth, and as a result, I am named after him – Avraham.

I had an opportunity to catch a glimpse of the Moroccan environment of my grandfather's house in the summer of 1950 when my many aunts and uncles in Morocco invited us to come and visit the city of my mother's birth. Morocco was still under French rule such that we were able to enter with our new Israeli passports. It was amazing and exciting to pass abruptly from the severely austere Israeli regime after the War of Independence to the abundance and goodness of the tables and feasts of the Moroccan Jews. I was then a child of about fourteen and I roamed around amazed and curious through the street of the casbah of the Moroccan Arabs who were not enemies. I examined well the big produce warehouses of my grandfather which lay in his big stone house in which my aunt still lived. And just as in the old Sephardic cemetery on the Mt. of Olives at the time of my father's burial in 1982, the seed of Mar Mani was planted, perhaps there, in the summer of 1950, during my visit of a few weeks in the beautiful city on the Atlantic, there was planted in my soul the seed of A Journey to the End of the Millennium, which

sprouted forty-five years later, in the figure of Ben Attar who left Tangiers on his commercial travels.

As noted, [my] turning toward history came with the need to study significant junctures in the creation process of important national codes, and to this I will arrive later, but it (the study of history) is also done in order to give (lend, render) color and tangibility to a national identity in order to flesh out unique particulars (substance) and to paint it in living colors. Especially in our day when a greyish, digitalized CNN image bombards us from satellite dishes, cable networks and the internet, and more and more we become a global village connected through economic ties, fluctuations of the dollar and stocks in different stock exchanges, nations and sub-nations are seeking to sharpen and enrich their identity through the cultivation of their "small," local history. The Czechs are separating from the Slovaks, The Scots suddenly establish their own parliament, the Welch will certainly follow their example. The Normans and the Bretons return and reconstruct memories of their historical past, and here and there even small nations try to resurrect languages and ancient dialects that were forgotten.

The Jewish People, which sees itself as an ancient historical people, does not live with consecutive, detailed, historical memories but rather with mythological formulae. It is no coincidence that Gershom Sholem said that Zionism returns the [Jewish] People to history, not only to the history that is active in our day but to that of the past as well, which awaits our interest and our research. A mythic formula is, by its essence, a-historical or metaphysical, and in that respect, current events can only struggle with it but not change it.

It is not explained by the accumulation of details, but rather it uses them for its own needs. The people who stood for long hours at street junctions, rain or shine, with signs – Hevron is Ours and Our Forefather's – in protest against the withdrawal from Hevron, they actually know very little about this Hevron so dear to their hearts. They remember that perhaps M'arat HaMachpelah was bought/acquired there almost four thousand years ago and the bloody riot against the Jews of Hevron in 1929. These two events are enough for them to establish Hevron in their consciousness. The real historical Hevron, its streets, its buildings, its population that has lived there for hundreds of years, they are not interested in them. Just as it does not interest the Jew, who knows how to quote full pages from the Rambam, when the Rambam lived, who influenced him, and in what cultural and intellectual background he worked.

The new historical work, which Zionist Jewish historians began with the emancipation in the 19th century, stands in opposition to the essential, Jewish, religious understanding, which is not historical but rather mythological, and always seeks to draw us into a dizzy cycle of destruction and redemption, sin and atonement, exile and return. Therefore, it is no surprise that according to the religious calendar, it is possible to combine the destructions of the two Temples, which were built 650 years apart, into one date. Because, we note that the details and the dates are not important; what is important is the principle.

But art requires historical detailing in order to construct from within it its imaginary world. Because I believe that art (and it is not important in what medium one works: literature, painting, music, theatre or cinema) can serve as the most effective mediator

between the past and the present. For one of the most pleasant delights in writing this book (apart from the pleasure of escaping from the Israeli present (reality) of Bibi Netanyahu's government) was working with historical texts and the historians themselves, who were generous and patient. They who write their research (studies) for such a small group of scholars, were amused and enthused by the fact that an author sought to distribute their teachings by way of his strange fiction.

When the book was completed, I was afraid of how they would react when they discovered the historical details they gave me mixed up wildly in my fiction, with its erotic descriptions or its strange legal court cases like the scene in the wine cellar near Paris. However, to my joy, I felt that all in all, I passed their test successfully. Especially dear to my heart were the reactions of outstanding religious scholars, whose deep religious feeling was not offended (made to cringe) by the religious license I granted my characters. And then I again realized that you do not need to be an historian to write an historical novel; you do not even need to study that much. If you employ the same sensors and empathies that you employ with every work of art, current or autobiographical, history, even that which is distant/remote, is drawn willingly toward you.

And this brings me to an essential issue dealing with religious issues. I am not a religious man, and I do not believe in the existence of personal Divine providence - not because of a specific opposition to the religion of Israel but rather because of my inherently rational position in the world, which rejects from its essence, ideas like holiness, redemption, the world to come etc. But, to my great fortune, I had the opportunity in my youth to become familiar with the customs of the religion from close up, to be comfortable with the

prayers and to be in touch with my grandfather who was an active rabbi. There is no possibility of writing an historical novel about Jews without knowing how religion is entwined in every day life, what are its compulsory rituals (ceremonies) and what are its norms. The great opposition of young people today to everything connected to religion and the deep alienation they feel regarding religious issues prevent them almost a-priori from dealing with materials of the past, and this is a shame because thus they distance from themselves the ability to think deeply about complex situations which sometimes have strong spiritual potential and clear implications for our day. The tendency to think that the further (deeper) one goes backward in time, the religious Jews are even more benighted and more ignorant, this is completely mistaken. One of the nicest surprises in writing this book was the discovery of the women's synagogue in Worms that was established there one thousand years ago. Suddenly you receive a kind of gift like this in the depths of Jewish history, which I immediately fit into the novel.

The more I immersed myself in the material, I understood that specifically because the Jews were much fewer, so spread out, and isolated, their religious norms were more flexible, more dynamic, more independent in each and every community, less bound by frozen legislation, dictated a priori. An obligatory Shulchan Aruch did not yet exist, and there was certainly no need to become defensive toward secular Jews who threaten [the community] with a different identity.

Here the problem of language also engaged me. Because I had already written a whole novel composed only of dialogues and two novels composed of internal monologues and streams of consciousness, I was able to permit myself now to write a novel in the third

person of a more austere and ponderous nature in which the dialogues and the internal monologues would be fewer, a book in which the author or the narrator, who is not identified in this book as a clear personality at a given time, retains (leaves in his hand) full control over the story's transmission. I did not feel I had the ability and the knowledge to try and construct conversational language of people one thousand years ago, at a time when even the European languages, like German or French, were strange early dialects of the languages we know.

Perhaps this created in the book a certain distance from the characters of the novel, as one reader said to me – sometimes there was a feeling that I am looking at your characters like silent goldfish floating in a beautiful aquarium. But it was clear to me that an effort to delve deeper into the internal conversations of my characters was likely to increase the loss of credibility. I wanted the language to be more elegant (elevated), wrapped in the aroma of ceremonial (festive and/or solemn) antiquity. I also wanted it to be sensual so that the tangible world that would be created by means of it would compensate for the foreignness and the remoteness of history. Indeed I had a special pleasure in elevating the Hebrew language using a thesaurus, even as a kind of personal, private protest against the poor, thin language used in Israeli literature today.

Sometimes, for an historical novel there lurks the danger of becoming, in the end, a kind of book for young people because of the author's slightly paternalistic stance toward characters of the past. As if the historical period which envelops the characters takes away from the seriousness and the heavy responsibility of their deeds and their thoughts. The author must be careful of this. Every time I wondered if the characters of the novel were

able to think this or that complex thought or to feel this or that complicated feeling, I was always reminded of the complex and rich souls of the characters in Greek tragedies and dramas who lived one thousand five hundred years before the characters of A Journey to the End of the Millennium. Time does not make us more human but rather perhaps more knowledgeable. While I was writing I was always careful to observe the characters straight, at eye level. Not, heaven forbid, from above [looking] down in a kind of modern condescension which scrutinizes ancient people.

This is the key to the success of the historical novel. And in general, one must remember, that from the vantage point of depth and complexity of feeling, the souls of people in the past were perhaps richer than our own, precisely because the ways of understanding and the connection with the world by means of knowledge was much more limited. Often emotion and imagination compensated for a lack of knowledge and understanding.

This novel has a few subjects, but the central subject of the novel I saw primarily to be the struggle between moral and cultural codes in changing historical situations. In the history of the Jewish people this struggle had a fascinating side because it was done without the coercive force of a central government which could impose new codes from above but rather [it was accomplished] through voluntary, free dialogues between communities of Jews that could not control one another but rather only influence one another, a practice that continues even today to a certain degree, in cultural dialogues like on the subject of "Who is a Jew" that we carry out with Jews of the Diaspora.

The dialogue that is being conducted in the book also pertains to the ethical, cultural code of a woman's status and place by means of the question of polygamy and divorce without a woman's consent. The status of a woman and her place is one of important moral touchstones (of the strength) of a human society. Even though Ben Attar and his wives come from the rich, open south which exists in relative harmony with the Muslim world around it, they are the ones who, in the end, bend (surrender) their natural, communal code so that it will match the code of absolute monogamy that arises from the small Jewish community which is much smaller and poorer both materially and culturally but stronger in moral fervor.

How does this codes dialogue even occur? And by dint of what is it driven? What wins and what loses and why? What is the meaning of victory and what are the remnants of the old, defeated code that are still at play, living and infiltrating our consciousness? In what form will it erupt anew? These are the questions I wanted to examine not vis a vis one thousand years ago but rather regarding the present in which we struggle between cultural and moral codes of different groups: religious and secular, easterners and westerners, Arabs and Jews.

Dialogues – this is my key word today. Will the Israeli reality prepare itself to the opening of new cultural and moral dialogues with the coming of peace, or God forbid, (will it) deepen and close the religious, Arab, Mizrahi, Yuppy enclaves and others (as well).

I feel that especially because this enclave of mine – the secular, liberal, socialist, democratic, western – is likely to be besieged and disconnected from the Israeli reality that is

gradually splitting and diversifying into different and strange cultural and social codes, we must try to establish at all costs dialogues with the surroundings. Indeed we want not only to survive but also to influence and lead.

Conclusion

The word for ship is *s'fina*. The root letters of this word also spell *safun*, which means hidden. Ben Attar and Abu Lufti hid some of their merchandise in the hold of the ship. The vessel itself, transformed from an old Viking ship, serves as a metaphor for the many hidden layers of Yehoshua's narrative. On the surface, *Journey to the End of the Millennium* presents Sephardic culture as a lost treasure. The novel serves as a harsh criticism of northern Jews, their bleak villages and their narrow-minded legalism. However, Yehoshua need not expose his readers to the fear, the confusion and the secret desires of his characters to create a tribute to Sephardic culture. Rather, he reveals layer after layer of their thoughts to communicate a more complex message.

First, Yehoshua teaches us that human emotions rarely occur one at a time. Rather, they arrive in pairs creating a tense duality. Sometimes Yehoshua's characters acknowledge this duality. Sometimes they do not. The narrator, however, always does. He serves as a constant explorer of the human landscape crossing all boundaries in his explicit chronicle of family strife, hidden desire, and overwhelming pain. Yehoshua, as the narrator, does not judge his subject's thoughts. However, he does create a narrative that, in the end, reveals a harsh judgment.

The "automatic reaction" assumes that Yehoshua condemns the cultural intolerance of Esther Minna and Master Levitas. The story makes a strong case for cultural tolerance. Yehoshua reports the years as they are recorded by the three dominant faiths. For example he writes, "Repudiation. That word was heard for the first time in the summer meeting of

the Spanish March in the year 4756 of the creation of the world, which was the year 386 of the Hegira of the Prophet, four years before the longed-for Christian millennium." (68) With this he consistently reminds the reader that people view time and hence, reality in many different ways.

Although Yehoshua makes a case for tolerance, he makes a stronger case for the limits of tolerance. Tsemah claims that although it might be possible in the year 2000, to write a novel that supports polygamy, this is not the real issue. As Moragh explains, Yehoshua condemns polygamy, which he employs as a metaphor for any behavior that diminishes the humanity of another. Moragh presents a convincing argument as to the "hidden" message of the novel, namely, that one cannot betray his/her moral code for the sake of cultural tolerance.

Esther Minna, however, does not serve as the conduit for this message. She presents no ideological context to her argument. Rather than a champion of human rights, she is a narrow-minded, manipulative woman afraid of losing her husband. It is the second wife who bears the heavy burden of Yehoshua's message. With her silence she teaches us that her status as a second wife is intolerable even though it is a cultural norm in her community. She reminds us that we cannot condemn the moral codes of others unless we also fight injustice in our own community.

Joseph son of Kalonymous fears the consequences of unbridled desire. The pagan experiences these consequences. His behavior is likened to idolatry when he becomes a slave to his passions. Through these two characters, Yehoshua expresses the need for

boundaries, not in our thoughts but in our deeds. Yehoshua accepts our inability to control our thoughts, however this does not excuse us from controlling our deeds. One can extrapolate this message of restraint to modern crises in Israel and throughout the world where, world leaders and young militants play out their fantasies on city streets converted into battlefields. Through the conflict between southern and northern branches of one family, Yehoshua teaches us that without a single moral code, there can never be a lasting unity between two sides.

In the introduction to the novel, Yehoshua addresses the challenge of creating a world our descendants will want to recall. Before He journeys back to the end of the first millennium, Yehoshua travels ahead 1000 years to ask whether anyone at the end of the third millennium will want to remember us at all.

Will that ancient soul, in whose moist, private womb flickers the transient shadow of our deeds and dreams, still exist then? Whatever it is called, lacking internal organs, crammed full of computerized liquids, miniaturized in wisdom and happiness, will it still feel the urge or the longing to travel back a thousand years and look for us, as you are looking for your heroes now?

Will our society be worthy of study, or will our descendants discard our "abstruse and muddled history just as we have got rid of the 'history' of the caveman?" With this haunting question, Yehoshua reminds us that the relationships we build, the dialogues we create and the moral stands we embrace will not only determine our place in history but shape the future as well.

Appendix A

Translation of "*Shirat Sepharad U'Sephardiut b'Yitzerat A.B. Yehoshua b'ikvot Masa el Tom HaElef*" by Ephraim Hazan

Masot al Tom HaElef pp. 77-79

"The poetry of Spain and Sephardiut (Sephardic culture) in the work of A.B. following
A Journey to the End of the Millennium"

The name of the book in the context of the time period (in relation to the time period) invites us in the most explicit and demanding way to connect ourselves with history, to return and to be part of the chain of generations. Jewish history inclusive of all its millennia is part of the present. The beginning of the mission was already imposed on the Hebrew reader in Mr. Mani and led him four generations back from his time, and here in one sweep Yehoshua seeks to draw the reader one thousand years into the past.

It was not for naught that the Hebrew "roots" of *kefilut* (doubleness) and *hakhpalah* (doubling) were cited in this book. It appears to me that the central doubling is the doubling of millennium. We are asked to telescope one millennium onto another and see ourselves in the mirror of the past. In the manner "One must see himself" or "show himself," to scrutinize the end of the second millennium and examine where our journey leads us. This is a common journey of those gathered together, the doubles and the multiplied, and today it is also possible to say the duplicated/xeroxed ones, and doubled (i.e. intermixed, of dual identities) Sepharadim and Ashkenazim, religious and secular. Jews and Arabs, veterans and

new immigrants – and in the background men and women...and all those gathered on the boat and all those who continue on the journey. Everyone is called to scrutinize again, to ponder again, to set one's sights and directions again.

I seek to present several of my insights in the wake of the novel: some literary, some historical, some from reality (the present reality), like a ponderer (one who muses) I will introduce my thoughts in the order that they present themselves to me.

1. The name of the book conceals within it a midrash (a play) on the word "*tom* (end)" with both of its two meanings: the conclusion and the end of the millennium and the "*temimut* (wholeness/simplicity or even piety)" as it were of the first millennium. It is also possible to (see it as) a profound midrash (on the word) "*tom*" as the reversal of the letters in "*mot* (death)" and thus with the end of the millennium comes *Masei HaTz'lav*, the Crusades (here too the word "*masa* (journey)" is linked to the name of the book and with it edicts of persecution and riots, killings and victims, sacrifices and martyrdom.

And now we will fold millennium upon millennium, and at the end of the second millennium, from more than fifty years before its close again death and destruction, these are emphasized well by the words of the apostate doctor from Verdun, who says to Rabbi Elbaz, "You will live, and they (points to the Jews of Metz) will die." He, the apostate, is confident that he has saved his own life, but the doubling of the millennium says to him that this is a total illusion and that at the end of the second millennium religious conversion will not help and will not save, that is to say it is impossible to flee from being Jewish.

2. The placement of the date and the tension between the times are also significant by virtue of the very name of the book. The "millennium" is, after all, a Christian date full of meaning, this point is emphasized well, and its spirit hovers over the entire book, but the time that flows through the book is Jewish time: the meetings with Abulafia on Tisha B'Av, and especially the journey to Worms as Rosh HaShanah is approaching, and the return: Yom Kippur in Verdun, Sukkot on the way and in Paris, when a parodic legal ruling accompanies it that one must be able to see the wagon for one's journey as a kind of ship on the sea, arguing that it (the journey) is being conducted by Abd el-Shafi who is the captain, and along this argument to allow the wagon to "sail" on a holiday.

That is to say: Their inner Jewish lives that are being conducted internally, and their time and their festivals are ultimately dependent, in an utterly fateful way, upon the general course of history.

3. Relationships between Sepharadim and Ashkenazim and the attributes of personality peculiar to every segment of the Jewish People, this is well highlighted in two lines in the consciousness of Esther Mina, when she is in Worms pensive and perplexed "Although Mistress Esther Mina was well acquainted with the character of her fellow countrymen, who clothed even the most delicate and affectionate sentiments in sternness..." (182) The seriousness and the dryness, the distance and the restraint, these come to expression in the (hyphenated) name with a title, Mistress Esther-Mina. If names had been given to the "first" and the "second," the wives of Ben Attar, these names would certainly not have included an adjective (modifier), moreover, they would have been constructed as

(in the pattern/format of) affectionate names, for example: Eshterika or Eshterina or Sherina and the like, names of closeness and affection.

I do not know if the author seeks to invite us to ponder this difference specifically, or to continue to compare and to distinguish between the attributes and central characteristics of the two parts of the Jewish People, and of course we are called to carefully consider how, from them, we will build our Israeli identity: Between stringent treatment and decision making that leaves no room for leniency versus the complexity of making peace.

Between Beit Shammai and Beit Hillel, that is to say between militant religiosity on the one side and a secularism no less militant on the other, extremes without compromise or negotiation. In contrast to this comes Sephardic religious life that combines a life of Torah and mitzvot and a life of practicality, that knows how to absorb and how to digest a secular culture or even the Sephardic tradition (itself) which is not understood by many of us, that created for itself a compromise (in relation to) the synagogue: the laws of Kashrut, Shabbat of foods, and side by side with these a Sabbath of soccer and of traveling to the ocean.

A compromise which includes a contradiction, which looks upon itself with an indulgent smile like Rabbi Elbaz, a daydreaming rabbi who allows for the traveling of wagons on a holiday. An outlook and a relation (to the law) like this is likely to bring reconciliation and negotiation out of understanding and merging. For only a perspective such as this made possible a complex of culture integrated with another culture after the model the Arab Jewish culture of the Golden Age of Spain. Only a perspective such as this enabled the growth of poetry of eroticism and Jewish wine poetry side by side with a page of piyuttim

and prayers of petitioning God for forgiveness and writings of philosophy and ethics. This is the framework that gave rise to the modern Hebrew Enlightenment.

The life story of a Maskil in the nineteenth century began with the "discovery" of the *Kuzari* or the *Guide for the Perplexed* and from systematic thinking and logic, he moved on to discover the poetry and culture of Spain. This culture winks (flirts) with its logic and love of life, and it tries to construct a Judaism combined with "Derekh Eretz," skills appropriate to modern life....

It seems that the call to reflect upon Journey to the End of the Millennium and the end of the second millennium asks us to link up with Jewish history, to plan anew the construction of our identity from all its many component parts, to demand from ourselves tolerance and attention, and above all not to give up on the Jewish infrastructure, with all of its parts and its great richness, this Judaism in no way being the legacy (only) of those referred to as "religious" - to the contrary many times over the main part of the challenge, is to establish a secular Judaism worthy of its name, one that is well-versed in ancient and modern Hebrew literature, one that is familiar with Jewish history, one that seeks a way to express its Judaism out of an appreciation for the totality, absolute freedom for the individual and out of choice and free will. Alienation (distance) and lack of knowledge are huge obstacles to this mission that is the very linking of ourselves with Jewish history and establishing a connection between the first and second millennia. (between the years 1000 and 2000).

Appendix B

Translation of "El Kdi HaHeresh HaM'leim Prahim" by Aviva Doron

Masot el Tom HaElef pp. 87-95

"To The Ceramic Jug Full of Flowers"

An invitation to a journey that is far and close at the same time

The offer of A.B. Yehoshua to join him on a unique journey to the end of the first millennium, invites the Israeli reader approaching the end of the second millennium, to enter behind the scenes of the historical stage known to him by its favored nickname *moreshet* "heritage," and to encounter a scene of sharp contrasts and bitter struggles, the product of the deep schism that can be observed in the world of Jewish culture.

The book causes the reader a vigorous jostling, just like the pitching/tossing of the small ship, on which one is invited to spend time crowded with people he does not know, with whom perhaps he would not choose to spend his free time. But behold he finds himself obligated, if he wishes to understand what is happening around him, to be attentive to these people, to become acquainted with their mannerisms and to study their world. During the continuation of the journey he will become friends with some of the travelers, be repelled by others, will be impelled to take a stand in the piercing dispute between the Jewess from Paris and the Jew from Morocco, he will smile at the boy from Seville, and perhaps show a special interest in Rabbi Elbaz and the Andalusian culture he represents. In this framework, we will seek to study the character of the Rabbi from Seville, and we will peer at

a picture of the condition of the world of Andalusian culture at the end of the first millennium.

The Literary "Baggage" of the Rabbi from Seville – Cultural Openness

In the year 999, the year of the journey to the end of the millennium, Shmuel HaNagid is a boy of six. The city of his birth, Cordoba, is an economic and cultural center, with no equal in Europe thanks to the activities of Abdul al Rahman the third, the radiance of whose achievements had not been dimmed, although thirty-eight years had passed since his death. The city dwellers, Jews and Muslims, connected (intertwined) in international commercial relations with Europe, the East and India already from the days of Hisdai Ibn Shaprut, the first of the Jewish diplomats in Spain, the advisor of Abdul al Rahman, communal leader of the Jews of Andalusia and the one responsible for the foreign merchants who used to come to Andalusia, and for the foreign relations of the kingdom. Paralleling the economic cooperation there is conducted (goes on) in Cordoba a cross-cultural dialogue: the rich library serves the scholars of the city, all of whom are proficient in Arabic, and by means of it they are able to read poetry, sciences, and philosophical writings like the works of Plato and Aristotle, which were translated into Arabic. This is the vaunted library by means of which the Rambam, who would be born in Cordoba thirty-six years after our journey, would be able to become acquainted with (introduce himself) to the Greek philosophical works, an acquaintanceship whose echoes (resonances) are recognized in his philosophical writings.

Approaching the end of the first millennium Jewish philosophy still waits for the Rambam; Shmuel ibn Nagrila, who would become "HaNagid" and would write poetry of war,

In conclusion

A.B. Yehosua's invitation to sail with his central characters from Maghreb to places of Ashkenazic authority, as the ship kisses the beaches of Andalusia, arranges a meeting for the reader with a rabbi who represents a beautiful aspect of Judaism, the shining face of Sephardic Judaism. The reader is introduced to Rabbi Elbaz the Andalusian, the pleasantness of his ways, his esthetic sensitivity, the virtue of his attentiveness to human beings, his openness to the world of human experience¹² side by side with his adherence to Torah and to his way of intertwining Torah and the writing of humanistic poetry, poetry that expresses love between people.

This invitation could not have reached the Israeli reader at a more appropriate time than the end of the second millennium, when rough waves grow bigger and distance themselves from the cultural characteristics represented by Rabbi Elbaz. Perhaps this invitation will remind and awaken that same conception of culture that can be a model of openness and dialogue.

¹² Here Doron refers to *Olam HaMa'arot*, literally "the world of visions."

The author connects the pleasantness of the ways of the Andalusian rabbi to two processes: one is connected to the Andalusian education that he absorbed in "...his home town, Seville, and to the elegant courtesy of its inhabitants." (27) and the second stems from the connection the rabbi makes between the rabbinate and poetry: "Ben Attar had noticed that the rabbi was holding between his fingers a goose quill that he constantly sharpened with a penknife....Not a day had passed before Ben Attar observed that the rabbi was using it to inscribe words upon an unfamiliar strip of parchment." (30); and when he peers at the writing "He discovered the disjointed lines of a poem or hymn..." (30) And after the manner of the Andalusians, who bound the study of Torah together with the composition of poetry, so also Rabbi Elbaz: The composition of poetry does not distance him from halakhah, but rather adds to his personality an aspect of attentiveness and pleasantness: "The verses he had written in the preceding days softened his personality made it more flexible. his personality." (29) "For the rabbi, the mere fact of writing a poem was something wonderful; he had never imagined that he himself would be able or eager to do such a thing. But during the previous week six lines had put themselves together, all in Hebrew following the meter and rhyme scheme that had been brought to Andalus from the east by Dunash ben Labrat." (26)

Rabbi Elbaz does not narrow his vision as (only) a point of departure from but rather he sees man as a whole. Thus he describes Ben Attar: "Ben Attar had not come from so far away to demand satisfaction for loss of business. Nor would it have entered the rabbi's own head to undertake such a long and terrible journey for the sake of a mere merchant's dispute....No, Rabbi Elbaz saw Ben Attar not as a merchant but simply as a man disguised as a merchant....he was a loving man, a philosopher and sage of love." (134)

The Andalusian rabbi intertwines his obligation to the study of Torah with the love of that which is beautiful, of esthetically pleasing buildings cultivated greenery. He intertwines his adherence to the judgments of Torah with a vision of man as a whole, with his relationships and his feelings. He is strict with himself and for all this he regards as important pleasant manners and is attentive to the needs of the community. He intertwines well his adherence to the Torah with an openness to the needs of his surroundings and with listening (hearkening) to the senses. Thus, for example he decides to respond to the new situation that setting sail creates and to allow emotions to put off the study of halakhah a little and leave them to a later time. "At first the rabbi had thought to study some simple texts of mishnah and Talmud with the boy, but once the sea journey had aroused such powerful poetic feelings in him, he had postponed rational studies until they were on shore again..." (60)

An additional example of his attitude: Rabbi Elbaz, described as a man of halakhah who will not agree to compromise on the fulfillment of mitzvot like "to consume forbidden foods," (60) will be ready to demonstrate flexibility with regard to external behavior, like Muslim style dress, and when the Jewish rabbi is asked to appear as a Muslim: ...the rabbi manifested no alarm at the surprising request....so long as he was not required to consume forbidden foods he was ready to shroud his head like Abu Lutfi and disguise himself as a Muslim, until it became plain what kind a welcome the inhabitants of Rouen were reserving for them." (60)

journey on the festival but could recite the festive prayers and fulfill the obligation to construct a tabernacle while moving." (261)

On the side of his ruling, the rabbi defends great strictness: "The Andalusian rabbi's firmness having paid off, the second wife was laid to rest that very night in a little burial ground squeezed between a fair vineyard, the property of Count Galand, and a small chapel dedicated to the unfortunate Saint Mark." (265)

Within the weaving of the story he is called "The Andalusian rabbi," and indeed we become familiar with his behavior characteristic of the Andalusian area (whose source is the Andalusian area), which was the place of his upbringing and his education, kavim? Which become sharpened with the help of the descriptions of his son. In the descriptions of the two of them there is reflected the esthetic sensitivity, the attention to one's senses which characterize the Jews of Andalusia: Rabbi Elbaz, "Accustomed as he was to the bright beauty of his home town, Seville..." (27) "...he drew up a large log from the woodpile standing ready for winter and sat to enjoy the pleasant moonlight..." (108) "But from the moment they had disembarked onto dry land his old nature had returned, and he felt homesick for his little house and everything else – his cousins and his friends and the earthen flowerpots hanging on the bright blue-painted walls." (108)

Andalusians, like the Jews of Morocco, are accustomed to beautiful buildings and flower gardens which they lack in Europe: "By comparison with the spacious mosques of that the visitors were familiar with in North Africa and Andalus...the cathedrals of Rouen seemed cramped and sad in its dark severity..."(62)

shouted demand for the replacement of these judges, who had certainly prejudged the case..." (118-119) "Even Master Levitas...was confused by the rabbi's surprising suggestion." (119) The Andalusian rabbi is endowed with such intelligence and shrewdness that he strikes fear in the hearts of his opponents in the dispute. "...Joseph, son of Kalonymos was determined to dispense with the overabundant services of Elbaz, fearing that the clever rabbi would distort and improve the women's replies..." (207) Elbaz is indeed sophisticated in the procedures of the dispute: "Into this crack Rabbi Elbaz now attempted to insert like a lance the sermon he had devised while rocked by the waves of the sea." (127) He meticulously considers the Rabbi's tactics in the argument: "Elbaz hesitated at first between a wish to lull his adversaries' concern about the danger he represented and a desire to make them aware of the pitfalls of the battlefield." (187) And in a moment of confusion, he acts adamantly: "But Rabbi Elbaz frustrated his intentions and gently yet respectfully hurried to restore the confidence of the bewildered man, whom he still considered the right man for the job [so that he could trust that here, in Worms, the first ruling would only be strengthened. (205)]"¹¹

Elbaz is revealed as a rabbi who knows how to take the initiative (and judge in an original yet halakhic way) in accordance with the special and unprecedented circumstances such that he dares to rule on a sensitive and complicated issue which touches burial on a holiday: "Out of respect for the dear departed one, who longed to return to the dust, the rabbi from Seville decided to exercise rabbinic license and to deem the dry land sea and the wagon to be the equivalent of a ship, and in this way they did not have to rest from their

¹¹ Bracketed words do not appear in English translation.

sometimes related....And whatever the wives were unable to see or understand, the partner, Abu Lutfi, could add from his own Ishmaelite perspective." (29)

Explicitly he does not rely upon books alone. He even has doubts as to the qualifications of those who were made (placed as) judges on the basis of book knowledge alone: "They were scribes specializing to writing scrolls of the Law, phylacteries and amulets for doorposts, brought in from towns in the region to constitute the court. 'Scribes?' the rabbi muttered disappointedly. 'Men who try to discern what is written merely to copy it over and over again?'" (118) He does not accept the position of Levitas, who brought them with the goal that "They would be able to judge on the basis of what was written in books." "And what was the point of books? Rabbi Elbaz protested vehemently. If the answer was written explicitly in a book, would it have occurred to him to leave his city and entrust himself to the ocean to demand justice for his employer?" (118)

Attentiveness and openness to human beings does not detract from the aggressiveness that characterizes his behavior in court. "But Rabbi Elbaz held his ground." (192) "But who will chose the judges? The rabbi asked again." (117) "Have the judges already been appointed? Relentlessly he seized hold of Abulafia's black coat..." (117) He insists forcefully on his request to change the judges. "...in a wild shout that seemed unlikely to issue from such a pleasant, dreamy personality, that the judges should be changed forthwith." (118)

And he succeeds in affecting the court proceedings: "A silence fell. Everyone had heard the shout....Abulafia, shaken to the core by the rabbi's outcry....understood well the rabbi's

As a young man there is poured over his image a nuance of longing for love: "Rabbi Elbaz was particularly attracted to them...because their evident love for each other captivated his heart and reminded him of the lost days of his own love." (47) He remembers and mentions his wife: "Therefore, as the Jews assembled in the winery of Villa Le Juif gradually closed in around the parties to the suit, the rabbi from Seville began his confession about himself and his wife, as though his life were not unique and accidental but universal and exemplary, able to shed light on other lives as well." (135) He harbors the hope that he will be able to bind his life with the life of the second wife of Ben Attar whom he pines for from the time of embarkation. "But would the little Andalusian rabbi, who was now groping in the thick darkness of a crooked Rhenish room...speak out and explain the plan that he had thought up as a possible escape route...that he himself might free the banned man from the double marriage that was his downfall, not only by releasing the second wife from her marriage vows but by wedding her himself and taking her into his home in Seville, so that she should not remain alone. But while Rabbi Elbaz was floundering and longing for an opportunity to explain his new plan, Ben Attar asked him to hasten [their departure]." (213)

As a rabbi Elbaz is described as someone who has mastered the complexities of the books and nonetheless does not dismiss life in favor of the written word, but rather he pays attention to and learns from people. Thus, for example, even though "the arguments he had prepared back in Seville seemed perfectly sound" he prefers to reinforce and strengthen them "not to use the Scriptures but the unwritten law, which billowed up first in the mind, then turned sometimes into chance, long drawn-out conversations with Ben Attar, who may perhaps only have been waiting for an encounter with a bored sea traveler to speak openly about himself and his life. Whatever Ben Attar did not or could not tell, his two wives

The author sets up Rabbi Elbaz from Seville to fight, as a representative of "Southern" Jewry against the Jews of Europe, "with sharp convincing words of Torah" while he combines in his personality general characteristics of Andalusian Jewry with personal characteristics which come to expression in the course of the plot as a rabbi, a loving father, a young single man exposed to the titillation of the complex surroundings.

As a parent, Elbaz is presented as someone who demonstrates a special sensitivity to the reactions of his young son, attentive to them and accepts them even (those which are) in opposition to accepted norms. For example in relation to the boy's participation in sailing: "The boy immersed himself in the sailor's ways, learned the secrets of their tongue, and imitated their manner, so that he looked, in his short breeches and red turban, as though he had been born into the light of day not from his mother's womb in Seville but from the ancient belly of the guardship." (59)

Against all the advice and pressures of his relatives that he leave his son in Seville, the Sevillian rabbi listened to his fatherly instincts and took his son with him, "He had not forgotten the reproaches of his kinsfolk, who had pleaded with him to leave the motherless child behind and not subject him to the tedium and perils of the lengthy voyage. But the rabbi had insisted. After enduring the death of his wife, he was not willing to face a further parting. And when he beheld the boys limbs filling out in the light of the sunshine and the azure sea, his skin growing dark and smooth, and his happy eager sharing in the work of the ship, he knew that he had been right to obey his own instincts rather than hearken to his family and friends." (59)

the holy tongue, and in the language of Yitzhak ben Kapron, the student of Ben Saruq
(together with Yitzhak ibn Jiktila and Yehuda ben David)...

The holy tongue did he destroy
That which was our saving grace
By rendering Hebrew in foreign meters....

Rabbi Elbaz and the Quill Pen - Halakhah and Poetry

Rabbi Elbaz, a native of Seville, thirty-three years old, a widower, father to a boy named Shmuel "embarked with his son on Ben Attar's ship, which had come to the port of Cadiz especially to fetch him." (26) The decision to join the journey obligated the young rabbi to leave "his home town, Seville" with "its bright beauty" and his family. (27) Alone with his little son he sets out on an unfamiliar journey to complete the special task for which he was hired: to defend the conception of marriage of the ship's owner from Tangier, husband to two wives, against the adamant stance of the new wife of his partner Abulafia, which had torn the two of them (apart), a goal whose aim was to "repair the broken partnership" (213) The European surroundings will see Rabbi Elbaz and his son, like Ben Attar, as "exotic Jews" (230) "...different Jews, who were under the protection of distant Ishmaelites..." (234)

In their prayer service too, the difference was emphasized: The Jews who arrive from the city of Metz to complete the minyan, according to the request of Rabbi Elbaz, would see in him the strange and the different: "the new, temporary Jew" (248) and likewise they would have difficulty "these northern Jews in joining Rabbi Elbaz and his son ...who extend themselves lithely on the ground like Muslims at prayer." (250)

eroticism, and wine that would influence those who come after him, was still a boy of six. However, already known in the cultural world of the Jews of Spain were the imprints of Menahem ben Saruq and Dunash ben Labrat, who were active in it (in the Sephardic cultural world) during the second half of tenth century. Menahem ben Saruq arrived in Cordoba from Toratosa, the city of his birth that is in the northern part of the peninsula and was accepted by the sons of Shaprut. He wrote – under the direction of Hisdai ben Shaprut – a letter to Joseph, the Jewish king of the kingdom of the Kuzarim. The letter, which was composed approximately forty years before the end of the millennium, merited great interest because of its touching the messianic yearnings of the people of his time period. The poem, entitled “The Victory of the Kuzarim” opens with the lines:

The Crowning Glory to the sceptre of sovereigns the vaunted kingdom
May the pleasantness of the Lord be upon it and peace upon its rulers
and the general of its armies.

And concludes with the sentence:

The glory of the festival will then be expressed to the Lord:
The time we have longed for will come....

Menahem ben Saruq devoted his days to the cultivation of Hebrew, respected the traditional, poetic style and preached the preservation of the holy tongue so that it might not be contaminated by foreign influences. A different conception was introduced by Dunash ben Labrat, a member of a younger generation, who was born in Fez and was educated in Baghdad, the capital of the Eastern Caliphate, the center of Arab culture and the center of Jewish culture, a place in which he was fortunate enough to be the student of Rav Saadiah Gaon. As a poet, Dunash aspired to study from the wonderful achievements of secular Arab poetry. His stance encountered powerful opposition from Menahem Ben Saruq and his students who fought, according to their method, against the desecration of the honor of

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