

YOU CAN'T GO HOME AGAIN: THE ISRAELI MEMOIR

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"Every place remains as it was and every place changes." (Yitzhak Bar-Moshe)

Recently, genres of autobiography have become significant in the Israeli literary scene. Works by Amos Oz, Aharon Appelfeld, Avraham Balaban join those by Eleonora Lev, Shlomo Breznitz and others. The return to a personal past is counterpart - or perhaps counterweight - to the novels of Little Israel that began to proliferate at the turn of the century. This return to the past is much different than earlier works that used the past as process, as allegory. In these, the past is the subject and destination.

In this paper I propose to focus on a specific subset of memoirs: those written by Iraqi-born authors. This past year the Iraqi Jewish literary community has suffered the loss of several significant figures: the short story writer Yaakov Lev (Bilbul), the memoirist Yitzhak Bar-Moshe and most recently, Samir Naqqash. At the same time, Jewish Iraqis have had the tantalizing possibilities of return dangled before them, in the wake of the U.S. War on Iraq and capture of Saddam Hussein, only to have those hopes dashed as the situation becomes ever more chaotic, and the society more polarized. In light of this, there is even greater recognition of this current generation being the last generation of Jewish Iraqis, and resignation to the geopolitical realities. So they are forced to recover their lost homeland through substitute strategies, to seek solace in alternates, most notably in the written word.

Emphasizing Sasson Somekh's *Bagdad Etmol* with reference to similar autobiographical prose, especially the memoirs by Nissim Rejwan and Yitzhak Bar-Moshe, I explore how these narratives present the past, and how they shape these presentations to their intended audiences. By analyzing the works I intend to show how they balance the halutz-kibbutz memoir on one hand and the European past on the other. With a physical return to Iraq as out of reach now more than ever, the memoirs serve as a surrogate to their authors, as archives for fellow immigrants, and as a significant fount of information for generations to come.