

## **A VOICE CALLING IN THE WILDERNESS: RELIGION AND REDEMPTION IN A. B. YEHOSHUA'S EARLY FICTION**

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The development of A. B. Yehoshua's work is marked by an increasing tendency to attain signification through the establishment of analogical relationships between the individual and social levels of experience. A representative manifestation of this reciprocal relationship between individual psychology and social ideology may be seen in Yehoshua's ongoing preoccupation with the causes and consequences of individual and communal submission to religious authority. Yehoshua perceives a debilitating dichotomy between the religious imperatives of the Jewish faith and the national imperatives of the Jewish homeland. He argues that acceptance of the religious system results in an abnormal displacement of national loyalties. For its code postulates the superiority of adhering to the delusional promise of redemption proffered by an abstract spiritual faith over the possibilities of true redemption inherent in the concrete connection between the Jewish people and the Jewish homeland. In pursuing the causes and implications of this basic national characteristic, Yehoshua traces its origins to the definitive experience of a nation born in the wilderness. There is a close affinity between this central psycho-historical perception and an evolving matrix of concepts and images that inform many of his fictional works. Within this matrix, images of the wilderness are transmuted into symbolic constructs that are increasingly associated with the role of authoritarian metaphysical systems in subverting the natural affinity of the nation with the physical realities of its land. Such early stories as "An Evening in Yatir Village" and "The Last Commander" as well as the novella, *Early in the Summer of 1970*, lay the thematic foundation for the anticlerical disavowal of transcendent authority that Yehoshua was to further develop in his later works. They also establish the wilderness as the experiential and symbolic arena in which the influence of transcendent authority is most powerfully exercised and, consequently, as the space in which this influence must be resisted.