

CHRONICLES OF HOMES OR THE YOUNG HISTORIAN: *THE EXECUTIONER'S VISIT* BY LILY PERRY: (H)

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Daniel, the thirteen-year-old boy who is 'too clever for his age but is afraid and anxious as befits his age', narrates the chronicles, or the history, of his dysfunctional family in Lily Perry's novel *The Executioner's Visit*. Daniel has to write an essay for his history class on the destruction of the first Temple (in Hebrew 'the First House') and he chooses to write about the destruction of his own house/family. The assignment lends its discursive structure to Daniel's account of his parents' divorce and the subsequent suicidal depression of his mother. His narrative is constructed around what he perceives to be an accurate, objective and well-researched historical account. His anger at the mother who wants to die, his Oedipal rivalry with his father and his cries for help are all delivered within the paradigms of 'professional and scientific' chronicles. The child narrator cannot maintain the 'impartial' and 'detached' position of the so-called professional historian, partly because of his young age and mainly because the inability of the historiographical discourse to deal with raw emotions and complex human relationships. Thus, the narrative raises fundamental questions regarding the authority and status of the historians' discourse as a custodian of human chronicles in general and of the Israeli national narrative in particular.

The discrepancy between the national discourse of catastrophe and the child's perspective, which constructs the familial narrative, inevitably leads to satire and parody. This ironic stance is enhanced by the dialogue of Perry's novel with Benny Barbash's '*My First Sony*', an earlier family narrative, told through a boy narrator, who takes upon himself to record and document the history of his family's disintegration. The intertextual relations between the two novels are extensive, encompassing specific aspects as well as the overall framework. Thus a complex revision of a long tradition in Hebrew and Israeli literature is set in motion: referring to the reconstruction of childhood (mainly boyhood) memories written by male writers and to the use of family narratives as a reflection of the history, ideology and politics of the national narratives. Lily Perry's novel may be taken as a counter-narrative against the background of this tradition:

1. Her narrator-chronicler is a boy, thus no semblance of autobiographical writing can be assumed thus the aesthetic manipulation of the narrative is positioned at its forefront.
2. While family narratives and their language are usually appropriated by national discourses, Perry reverses this process as the language of national discourses and the methodologies of its historiography are employed to characterize the family.

3. Consequently, politics, especially gender politics, is positioned at the core of family narratives and this political agenda becomes the paradigm for the study of the wider social and cultural context.