

selalevavi@yahoo.com

CAN SARA PREVENT THE SACRIFICE?
The Counter-Violence Narratives of Orly Castel-Bloom and Lea Aini

Shirli Sela-Levavi
Rutgers University

In this paper I read Orly Castel Bloom's *Dolly City* (1992) and Lea Aini's *Ashtoret* (1999) as joining a literary Israeli discourse on the meaning of the sacrifice of Isaac as national emblem. Within the relatively new tradition of Israeli female novelists, who appropriate the symbol and/or challenge it from a feminist perspective, these authors also chose to usurp the role of Abraham. When reading the novels, I try to question the effectiveness of this position in challenging the violence of the Akedah, and in suggesting an alternative to its brutality.

In my psychoanalytic reading I suggest that the Akedah functions in these novels as an emblem of patriarchy, of the symbolic order and of the state. *Dolly City* is a lively illustration of women's dereliction within the symbolic order as conceptualized by Lacan. For this reason, the female protagonist's attempt to hold an external position in relation to this order does not allow her to subvert patriarchal sign systems without being regarded as a lunatic. Dolly tries to evade the phallic signifier by establishing dyadic relations with her son, an option offered by another analytic school – Object Relations. However, this option, with its Hegelian overtones is also parodied in the novel. Dolly's attempt to evade the third term results in an unmediated (counter) violence, which should be read as a post-modern attempt to inscribe violence directly on the her son's body. These scenes uncover the extreme violence implied by Object Relations and by the Hegelian conceptualization of otherness and illustrate an apocalypse a-la Julia Kristeva, in which the elimination of the phallic signifier brings even more horrible forms of counter-violence.

In my discussion of *Ashtoret* I argue that Aini offers the Canaanite ideology, through Tschernichovsky's poetical tradition as an alternative to the national sacrificial narrative. However, this option is not a viable alternative to the Akedah first, because it is presented as a quintessentially Phallic one and second, because it also culminates in another type of "orgiastic" sacrifice.

Ironically, in both novels the language plays the central role and is characterized as masculine. While Castel Bloom tries to challenge it and deconstruct it explicitly through her protagonist, Aini uses it creatively through a male protagonist and eventually presents language, rather than Canaanism as the viable alternative to the sacrificial national narrative.