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LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY:
A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI WRITERS' LANGUAGE

Palestinian-Israeli literature is the literature of a minority that is in a state of political and cultural conflict with the Jewish majority. Thus, Palestinian literature has no clear-cut definition in Israel and is not considered part of the canon of Hebrew literature. To be considered legitimate by the Jewish majority, Palestinian-Israeli writers must disguise their political and cultural conflict with the majority culture and refrain from creating literature that is stereotyped or socially engaged. This article examines the rhetorical devices Palestinian-Israeli writers use to convey their emotions and attitudes toward the Jewish majority without expressing these overtly.

Key words: Palestinian-Israeli literature, cultural conflict, rhetorical devices, figurative speech, quotations; parallel structure

Introduction

Palestinian-Israeli literature, that is, literature written in Arabic within the State of Israel, is the literature of a minority in a state of political and cultural conflict with the Jewish majority. The political conflict is reflected in the fact that this literature is not clearly defined in Israel and is not considered part of the Hebrew literary canon. This lack of a clear-cut and legitimate definition for literature written in Arabic in Israel can be seen in its many definitions that are tied to the collective identity of the Arabs in Israel. Among the more than forty definitions for this literature, the following are used most frequently: "the literature of Israeli Arabs," "Arabic literature in Israel," "Palestinian literature in Israel" and "the literature of the Arabs of 1948" (Elad-Bouskila, 2001).

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The attitude of the Jewish majority toward Arabic literature written in Israel negates the Palestinian essence of this literature. The establishment, namely Israeli politicians and Middle East experts, claims that this Arabic literature produced within the boundaries of the State of Israel is not at its core Palestinian. Rather, it is a discrete literary genre that has developed unique characteristics differentiating it from Palestinian literature. This attitude of the majority culture toward the legitimacy of Palestinian-Israeli literature is not always founded on purely literary considerations. Political considerations are evident, since the very use of the word Palestinian involves a political dictum that is liable to be interpreted as the negation of Jewish existence in Israel (Snir, 1990). Furthermore in the U.S. media, Palestinians generally are not allowed to speak for themselves or to articulate their historical narrative (O'Connor, 2006).

In contrast, the Arab minority considers Arabic literature written in Israel to be fundamentally Palestinian. According to Palestinian writers, artists and thinkers, authentic literary works written by Palestinians in the State of Israel, in the West Bank, in the Gaza Strip, and in the Palestinian Diaspora in Arab or other countries share an essential common denominator: Palestinian identity (Jayyusi, 1992). Indeed, an examination of the development, identity and character of Palestinian-Israeli literature and of its relationship to the majority culture reveals a spiritual and cultural-national common denominator shared by the Arabs who inhabited Mandatory Palestine, which today is split into the State of Israel, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian Diaspora (Snir, 1990; Elad, 1993; Margolin, 1996, 1999).

Yet despite the political and cultural conflict between Palestinian-Israeli literature and the majority culture in Israel, the literature of this minority has begun to penetrate the Israeli literary canon (Hever, 1993), primarily due to its increased accessibility in recent years. The expanding emergence of Palestinian literature in Hebrew – either because many Palestinian works have been translated into Hebrew or because Palestinian authors are now writing in Hebrew – has provided the technical means for Palestinian works to enter the literary canon.

Yet this expanded accessibility to Palestinian-Israeli literature is not sufficient to penetrate the cultural majority. In other words, using the dominant language of the Israeli canon, i.e. Hebrew, is not enough to grant legitimacy to this minority literature. Indeed, for Palestinian-Israeli literature to gain legitimacy, its creators must disguise their political and cultural conflict with the majority culture and refrain from creating literature that is stereotyped or socially engaged. The creators of Palestinian-Israeli literature are compelled, therefore, to disguise their voices.

The writer's voice represents his unique view of the world, which may never be explicitly stated but appears in the text all the same. The writer's voice is the expression of attitude, emotion, certainty and doubt (stance) (Martin, 2000). The data in this paper are interpreted based on the assumption that "stance is interpreted in terms of the relationship between the speakers, the relative status of the speakers, and the presentation of self" (Precht, 2003, p. 241).

The social norms for using stance differ systematically across cultures (Precht, 2003), with writers from different cultures employing ingrained systems for expressing their emotions and attitudes. Palestinian-Israeli writers are no different and have their own system for expressing their emotions and attitudes in Israel. The inherent political, cultural and social dangers in exposing their genuine selves lead to the silencing of these writers' voices. This silencing is manifested in Palestinian-Israeli fiction in numerous ways. The most obvious method is to make their voices heard through the mouths of others, so that the writers ostensibly do not openly publicize their political opinions. Hence, their works can be considered legitimate as far as the literary canon is concerned.

Method

This article showcases the rhetorical devices employed by three Palestinian-Israeli writers to express their emotions and attitudes toward the majority culture without publicizing them openly. The corpus selected for this study comprises the most prominent Palestinian-Israeli writers: Emile Habibi's novel titled *Sarayah Bint El-Gool* [*Sarayah, the Evil Demon's Daughter*] (1991), Riyad Bayadas's collection of short stories titled *Alju wa Aljabal* [*The Hunger and the Mountain*] (1990), and Anton Shammas's novel, *Arabesques* (1986), written in Hebrew.

Emile Habibi

Emile Habibi was born in Haifa in 1922. He began writing short stories in the 1950s, and his first story, "The Mandelbaum Gate," was published in 1954. In 1972 he wrote his first novel, *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*, which became a classic in modern Arabic literature. The book uses ironic humor to describe the life of an Israeli Arab who attempts to conform to Israeli society while struggling to preserve his Arab roots. After this novel, Habibi wrote more books, short stories and a play. His last novel, published in 1992, was *Saraya, the Evil Demon's Daughter*. In 1990, Habibi was awarded the Al-Quds Prize by the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization], and in 1992 he received the Israel Prize for Arabic literature. Despite receiving this prize, Habibi was only marginally accepted and was able to penetrate the Israeli literary canon only by aligning himself with the hegemony of the majority culture while at the same time undermining it (Hever, 2007).

After accepting the Israel Prize, Habibi was accused of legitimizing Israeli anti-Arab policy. Habibi replied to these accusations by stating that a "dialogue of prizes is better than a dialogue of stones and bullets. It is indirect recognition of the Arabs in Israel as a nation. This is recognition of a national culture. It will help the Arab population in its struggle to strike roots in the land and win equal rights" (Greenberg, 1996).

Habibi's writing is neither stereotyped nor socially engaged, enabling him to create a universal common denominator between himself as a member of the

national Palestinian minority and the Jewish majority culture. At the same time, he undermines the majority culture by using symbolic stories alongside alternative stories that do not fit the universal perception of the majority culture (Hever, 1993). In this way, Emile Habibi disguises his voice but enables the skilled reader to reveal it by means of textual stratagems (Margolin, 1999).

The fact that Habibi disguises his voice is extremely noticeable in his literary oeuvre. An example of this can be seen in his book *Sarayah Bint El-Gool* [*Sarayah, the Evil Demon's Daughter*]. The book's plot moves back and forth between two narrators: the protagonist, whose identity is unknown, and the author. The protagonist is mentioned right at the beginning of the story, but is referred to as an anonymous entity about whom nothing is actually known until the end of the story. The protagonist is mentioned as he, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

> *And now, only now, he realized that all the stories he had told after 1948 were nothing but attempts to decipher the secrets of these sounds – from war to war.*
> *He said: A Voice of Israel broadcaster was the first one to reveal a clue to him, when his voice resonated, saying that the thunder of the Israeli guns and the moans of the wounded Arabs rose up to his ears like a wonderful symphony.*
> *It was said: The frequency of the dolphins' sound waves can only be picked up by animals.*
> *He said: And thus by the sharks whose jaws and flexible sets of teeth stretch forward, biting and crushing and swallowing and yielding their place to the next set, "a meal fit for a king accompanied by an orchestra" in their intestines.*
> *Sarayah Bint El-Gool*, E. Habibi, pp. 10-11
> [English translation by the author of the article]

In the above text Habibi uses many rhetorical devices to express his ideas. The first is figurative speech. Metaphor, the most prominent form of figurative speech, is used to make an implied comparison between two unlike things that actually have something in common (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The comparison is both logical and emotive, and its rhetorical impact is powerful (Landau, 1988). Metaphors make discourse more forceful and leave a lasting impression on the listener (Underhill, 2011). Habibi uses figurative speech to convey his message about the brutality of the Israeli conqueror in a picturesque way that the reader absorbs emotionally rather than intellectually (Landau, 1988). In the above text, Habibi artistically compares the hurtful utterance of the Voice of Israel broadcaster, who said that the thunder of the Israeli guns and the moans of the Arab wounded rose up to his ears like a wonderful symphony, to the noises of the sharks biting the dolphins, which sounded like a meal fit for a king accompanied by an orchestra. By comparing the Israeli conqueror to the ruthless sharks and the Arabs to the noble dolphins who are cruelly devoured despite being harmless, Habibi affects the reader both logically and emotionally.

The second rhetorical device Habibi uses in the above text is a unique syntactical structure – parallel structure. Parallelism involves repeating the same pattern of words or phrases within a sentence or passage to indicate to the reader that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. In the above text, the phrase "He said" opens each new paragraph. By using repetition and parallel structure, Habibi emphasizes and highlights the comparison between the sharks (the Israelis) and the dolphins (the Arabs).

The third rhetorical device Habibi uses is quotation. By means of quotes Habibi reinforces his position (Landau, 1988) without revealing his own stance. The voice in the text is the indirect voice of an unknown spokesman or a witness who heard what the Voice of Israel broadcaster said. This spokesman also relies on the words of other spokesmen to give credibility to his words, as follows: "It was said: The frequency of the dolphins' sound waves can only be picked up by animals." Habibi thus hides behind an ostensibly objective spokesman, whose words are also ostensibly objective. Using the voice of an indirect spokesman enables Habibi to separate himself from the knowledge, which is presented as an autonomous entity (Sarig, 1997:207). This device adds credibility to the knowledge on the one hand, while expressing Habibi's emotions and attitudes on the other.

The use of these rhetorical devices enables Habibi to express his emotions and attitudes toward the Jewish majority. Hence, Habibi's literary expression undermines the foundations of the Israeli political discourse and attempts to create a new discourse by looking back on the 1948 war. He does so by encoding the events characterizing the act of colonialism (Shinhav & Hever, 2004), as well as by encrypting his own voice.

Riyad Baydas

Riyad Baydas was born in Shefar'am in 1960. His short stories have been published mainly in the *Al-Jadid* and *Alcarmel* periodicals. Baydas is known to modern Arab literature researchers as an upcoming Palestinian-Israeli writer. In Elad's anthology of stories titled *Beyond the Near Horizon – Contemporary Arab Stories*, the editor (Elad, 1989) chose Baydas as the representative of Palestinian fiction in Israel. Jayyusi (1992) also chose some of Baydas's stories for an anthology of Palestinian fiction she edited.

The manner in which Baydas disguises his voice is quite conspicuous in his literary oeuvre. An example of this can be seen in his book, *Alju' wa Aljabal* [*The Hunger and the Mountain*]. The book, a collection of short stories, was published in 1990. The language of the stories in the collection is symbolic, and the political message they contain is disguised, as can be seen in the following excerpt:

The blazing sun retreats, retreats from the boundaries of the day. The moon plays with the drunken earth in the pale darkness. The burning sun tries to play the

game of night and day, but the moon, with its customary coldness, overcomes
the sparkling sun...
The birds are dying in Hebron! Shouted a small boy, very small, who knew that
the birds were dying in Hebron.
A little bird answered him:
I'm afraid of the night, boy, because our fate has been sealed. And if I stay later
than four o'clock, my fate is – death.
The small boy asked in wonder:
Why are you afraid to stay later than four o'clock?
The bird answered with fierce sadness:
Because it is dangerous to wander around after four o'clock.

Alju' wa Aljabal, R. Baydas, p. 13
[English translation by the author of the article]

Baydas's texts, like those of Habibi, are also written in the form of a national allegory that blurs the boundaries between the private and the public spheres. In this excerpt Baydas employs figurative speech and irony to tell the story of a little boy and a bird in Hebron. Irony is a rhetorical device, literary technique, or situation in which there is an incongruity between the literal and the implied meaning (Weizman, 2000). The implied meaning in this text is Baydas's protest against the situation in Hebron. Baydas uses images of the sun and the moon to emphasize the contradiction between nature and reality that the little boys and animals must endure. The contrast between the picturesque opening of this text and the dialogue between the boy and the bird has a strong impact on the reader's emotions. The pragmatic purpose of irony in this text is to create a communion of sympathy with the reader (Muhawi, 2006). Baydas's voice is disguised in this text. The writer is neither exposed nor present in the text, his opinions are not directly or explicitly stated, and the readers are never directly addressed or referred to. Yet at the same time, Baydas's voice is revealed in the excerpt. While the context of the excerpt is indeed a description of nature – the shining sun and the sunset – the topic of the entire story is fear of the sunset in Hebron. The author creates tension by interspersing the descriptions of the sun and the sunset with dialogues. The dialogue between the small boy and the little bird abruptly interrupts the description of nature, thus expressing Baydas's emotions and attitudes toward the majority culture without stating them openly.

Anton Shammas

Anton Shammas was born in 1950 in the village of Fassuta in the Galilee. He is known for his translations of the works of Emile Habibi into Hebrew, for his articles in the Israeli press, and especially for his first novel, *Arabesques*, published in 1986. Shammas as an author is controversial in Israel. His importance as a translator is

irrefutable (Somekh, 1993), but his original works are fraught with controversy (Snir, 1993; Margolin, 2003).

Anton Shammas's *Arabesques*, first published in 1986, enjoyed resounding success in Israel and the United States, yet both the book and its author remain the topic of ongoing discussions in Israel. Shammas's Hebrew writing has sparked a controversy among literary researchers. Some admire his ability to write in his second language without forgoing Arabic (Hever, 1987; Margolin, 2003), while others claim that his success derives not only from his literary talent, but also from the fact of his being a Palestinian (Snir, 1993). Nevertheless, this group also acknowledges Shammas's importance as a rare cultural phenomenon on the border between the two peoples (Snir, 1993: 24).

Despite Shammas's Hebrew writing and his interaction with Israeli culture, he has maintained his Palestinian identity. Many of his articles showcase the problems of identity among Israeli Arabs or Palestinian Arabs (Shammas, 1980; 1987; 1988), and this comes to the fore in *Arabesques*.

Arabesques is an autobiographical novel that raises the question of the identity and persona of the Israeli Arab in the eyes of other Israelis by means of fragments of memories: the Teller's fragments, which are combined in the general framework of the story, or the Tale. The chapters of the Tale and those of the Teller are interwoven into a story within a framework story. The chapters of the Tale describe situations in the lives of Arabs in a village, while the chapters of the Teller describe situations in the life of the narrator as a man of the world.

The Tale fragments have a quality of reminiscence. They are stories about things that took place during childhood, boyhood, and youth. The typical epic situation created in these stories is narrated in the first person singular. Yet despite this use of first person singular, what characterizes the fragments of the story is that the protagonist is an anonymous and almost documentary representative of the Palestinian youngster in Israel. The Teller fragments, in contrast, are chronological in nature, and it is possible to identify the narrator with the author, since Shammas makes deliberate and overt use of various biographical elements in them.

The Teller and the Tale chapters are interwoven as alternating sections in the novel. Yet they are also discrete and can stand as separate sections. Each section begins with a quotation. These quotations, taken from various sources, constitute the main rhetorical device Shammas uses. The Tale chapters open with popular quotations taken mainly from Palestinian culture, while the Teller chapters begin with quotations from Western culture. These quotations provide a superstructure for the entire novel, which is also structured in the form of a curving and picturesque arabesque line.

As noted, the quotations constitute a kind of superstructure for the novel, supporting and consolidating it. Using quotations from Western culture on the one hand and from popular culture on the other, Shammas creates two voices that are totally separate from each other in that the differences between them are polarized.

The two voices generate a self-standing extra-textual dialogue that expresses the author's personal voice. The transitions between the different voices are indicated typographically: they are printed in separate paragraphs and on separate pages before every chapter in the book.

The first quotation appears at the beginning of Part One, titled "The Tale: The First Five Chapters" (p. 7). This quotation offers the first hint to how Shammas has adopted allegory and symbolism to express his opinion about the complex reality in which he lives. He uses a quotation from George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*:

> *You told me, you know, that when a child*
> *is brought to a foreign country, it picks up the*
> *language in a few weeks, and forgets its own.*
> *Well, I am a child in your country.*

Quoting famous literary sources reinforces the speaker's position and presents and promotes information (Kayam & Livnat, 2004). Shammas uses Shaw's quotation as a rhetorical device to argue that he has forgotten his own language because he lives in a country that is not his own country and speaks a language that is not his language. In the second quotation at the beginning of Part Two, "The Teller: Père Lachaise" (p. 67), Shammas continues to express his attitude toward the complex linguistic and political reality in which he lives. This quotation is taken from Yehuda Amichai's poetry:

> *Dresses of beautiful women, in blue and white.*
> *And everything in three languages:*
> *Hebrew, Arabic and Death.*

The rest of the quotation also expresses Shammas's perceptions of the two defective halves of his [Palestinian] experience[1]: Palestinian culture on the one hand, and Western culture on the other, as detailed subsequently. The third quotation, at the beginning of Part Three, "The Tale Continued" (p. 101), is a translation of a Palestinian refugee song:

> *Taxi, taxi, take me for free –*
> *Had not the Welfare saved one in three*
> *They'd all be dead, the refugees,*
> *Taxi, taxi, take me for free.*

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[1] The following is taken from the synopsis of Arabesques appearing on the book's cover: "The two defective halves of one experience tell the story of an Arab family in a village in the Galilee, in a curving and picturesque arabesque line." See: Shammas, A. (2001). *Arabesques. A novel*, translated from the Hebrew by Vivian Eden. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

This excerpt is the first of a series of quotations appearing at the beginnings of the book's chapters that describe observations of the Arab village's peasant society. On the one hand, these observations reflect Shammas's criticism of the condition of the Arab peasants and of the practice of depicting the peasants as primitive illiterates. On the other hand, they represent the fact that the Palestinians live in a nation and a culture that are not their own. The quotations emphasize the differences between Palestinian culture and Western culture. In the above poem Shammas censures the fact that the Palestinians are refugees who must be dependent upon welfare.

The fourth quotation that opens Part Four, "The Teller: Mayflower 1" (p. 119), is a translated excerpt from Walter Abish's book, *How German Is It*:

> *Still, writers are not terribly reliable as*
> *witnesses for either the defense or the*
> *prosecution. They are also not to be relied*
> *upon as lovers. They lack patience. They seem*
> *to have a certain difficulty in taking pleasure*
> *from what they are doing. Like chess players,*
> *they are inwardly preparing themselves for the*
> *inevitable end game.*

In this quotation Shammas criticizes literary discourse as well as his own discourse. This criticism implies that writers tend to decode historical events and thus contribute to the fact that their texts only imply the truth. The fifth quotation at the beginning of Part Five, "The Tale Continued" (p. 135), is taken from a conversation between villagers:

> *How far is it?*
> *One cigarette.*

This quotation refers to the third quotation in that it continues to describe the primitive lives of the villagers. In contrast, the sixth quotation expresses Western culture. This quotation at the beginning of Part Six, "The Teller: Mayflower 2" (p. 147), is a translation of the poem "Variations on a Text by Vallejo, After Donald Justice" written in English by Bjorg Vik for a course at the International Writing Program:

> *My best friend, she is bright, her skin is soft*
> *Her eyes even more blue than the sky above*
> *the apartment house.*
> *She takes her chewing gum out of her mouth*
> *puts it into mine.*
> *Says I can have it for five minutes....*
> *Today it is Saturday. The sun is shining.*

And the student girls in the Mayflower
Will come in small groups in the evening
Their jeans are clean and they have washed
their hair.
The shampoo smells of herbs and fruit …
It is left behind them as an answer
Maybe as a sort of belief.

The seventh quotation at the beginning of Part Seven, "The Tale Continued: Another Two Chapters" (p. 161), is a translation of a Palestinian village proverb:

The cobbler is barefoot, and the weaver is naked.

Shammas continues to depict the Palestinians and their poverty by quoting Palestinian villagers. In contrast, in the eighth quotation at the beginning of Part Eight, "The Teller: Mayflower 3" (p. 179), he describes the Israelis using an excerpt from A. B. Yehoshua's story, "Facing the Forests":

Near noon, the interrogators are replaced, and two new ones come and
begin the whole business over again. Streams of sweat drip from the
interrogatee.
How humiliating it is to be investigated for no rhyme or reason on the
scorched earth, on the stones, after a night of vigil. A kind of tediousness.
He spits, begins to get angry, lose his temper, takes off his glasses and his
senses dull.
He begins to contradict himself.
At three o'clock he breaks in their hands like a
tender twig, ready to suggest the Arab, as a
solution of sorts.

Shammas uses A. B. Yehoshua's description of prisoners being interrogated to confirm the Israeli use of violence. Thus Shammas undermines the underpinnings of the Israeli political discourse and attempts to encode the events of colonialism using someone else's voice (Shenhav & Hever, 2004).

The ninth quotation at the beginning of Part Nine, "The Tale Continued: Three Last Chapters" (p. 187), is taken from an article by Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav:

People say telling tales is good for sleep, and I
say it's meant to keep people awake.

Shammas uses this quote from Rabbi Nahman to reveal and object to the true identity of Hebrew literature as Jewish ethnic literature (Hever, 2007).

Finally, the tenth quotation from John Barth at the beginning of Part Ten, "The Teller: Mayflower 4" (p. 225), unites the Tale and the Teller sections and enables the reader to understand the message of the entire novel:

The narrator of the story is the story itself.

The quotations used in *Arabesques* provide an Ariadne-like thread that leads the reader through the sensuous caverns of the novel and returns him to the point of departure, which represents the novel's main point and the author's voice. Shammas uses these quotations to say "I – the author – am a child in your country, and I will never be one of you, and the difference between Israeli culture and Arab culture is so great that it creates death." Yet this main point is not openly revealed in the novel, and the author's voice is disguised. Rather than expressing himself explicitly, Shammas uses the indirect voices of other spokesmen – legitimate writers accepted by the majority culture – as a mouthpiece to express his personal voice.

By means of the quotations, Shammas clarifies the novel's main point, which is never overtly expressed: the complex and impossible reality of a Palestinian author living in Israel. The language of the quotations therefore represents the author's hidden voice, used by Shammas to transmit a political message without turning the book into stereotyped or socially engaged literature.

Conclusion

This article has examined several excerpts by minority Palestinian-Israeli authors who write within the Israeli context. The Palestinian minority is a national and ethnic out-group caught up in an extremely painful and deep-rooted conflict with the Israeli collective. Hence, the discourse of this minority is often marked by the language of camouflage and repression (Hever, 2007). Furthermore, to be considered legitimate by the Jewish majority, Palestinian-Israeli writers disguise their political and cultural conflict with the majority culture and refrain from creating stereotyped or socially engaged literature.

The three Palestinian-Israeli authors considered in this article – Emile Habibi, Riyad Bayadas and Anton Shammas – use a number of rhetorical devices to express their emotions and attitudes toward the Jewish majority. These include figurative speech, irony, repetition and parallelism, and the use of quotations. These devices are both logical and emotive and have major rhetorical impact.

Quotations constitute the most powerful device used by these Palestinian-Israeli writers. This device enables them to reinforce their positions without revealing their true viewpoints. In using quotations the authors hide behind an ostensibly objective spokesman whose utterances are also ostensibly objective. Thus, the authors disguise their voices while publicizing their political opinions, so that their works can be considered legitimate by the literary establishment.

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