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Golgotha and the Galilee Lake in the contemporary Israeli Poetry – on the example of the selected poems of Hezi Leskli and Amir Or

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The contemporary Israeli poetry – created by both the older generation of poets (Avraham Ben Yitzchak, Pinchas Sade) and those who began their careers within the last decades of the twentieth century – has explored christological issues to a large extent. References to Jesus's life and death appear, among others, in the works of Hezi Leskli (1952-1994) and Amir Or (born 1956) who already at the time of their debuts, were regarded as the most important poets of the younger generation¹. Their strong position in the Israeli poetry was further confirmed by their subsequent achievements. Or is an author of nine volumes of poetry which were enthusiastically accepted by critics², while the works of Leskli, one of the most promising Hebrew poets, have been acknowledged after his third book and discovered anew after his premature death³. What links the writings of both poets, labeled by some critics as Postmodernist⁴, are the references to New Testament and the originality of their poetry

¹ A. Hirschfeld, *The Return of the Divine. Hebrew Poetry in the 1990s*, "The Modern Hebrew Literature". The Magazine of the Translation Institute, 1993 Autumn/Winter, no 11.

² See: <http://www.amiror.co.il>

³ See: G. Maayan, *Shivat aharei shel ha'mavet shel ha'meshorer* [Seven years after the poet's death], "Dag Anonimi" 2001, no 6, p. 20; R. Furstenberg, *Israeli Culture*, [in:] *American Jewish Year Book 1995*, p. 87. http://ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1995_12_Israel.pdf

⁴ See: S. Dotan, [review: H. Leskli, *Ha'Ahbbarim ve Lea Goldberg. Shirim 1989-1987*], *Makom le'shira b'lev ha'ir - Meshorer ha'hodesh* [The place for poetry in the heart of city – the poet of a month], www.poetryplace.org/laskli.about.html; R. Furstenberg, op. cit., p. 87; A. Alters, *Ha'mishpaha ha'meta*, [The dead family], "Maariv" 1992, August 21, p. 4, 6; A. Hirschfeld, *Le'taer et ha'esh we'lagaat be'hashmal* [To describe fire, to touch electricity], "Ha'arec" 1992, August 21; H. Hofman, *Shira al saf ha'tehom* [On the edge of a precipice], "Yediyot Ahronot" 1992, September 4, p. 19; G. Aldor, *Hezi Leskli ve'ha'rikud* [Hezi Leskli and dance], „Rehov" 1994, no 1, p. 89-91; N. Calderon, *Hezi Leskli – ha'rikud she'mishor bli ha'rakdan* [A dance goes on without a dancer], [in:] *Ha'shira ve'ha'rok be'Israel* [Poetry and rock in Israel], Tel Aviv 2009. See: I. Shenfeld, *Panim ve'masehot* [Faces and masks], "Al Hamishma" 1991, May 10, p. 20; H. Amit-Kochawi, *Panim o masehot* [Faces or masks], "Davar" 1991, December 6, p. 26; D. Armon, *Pidyon ha'met* [Ransoming the dead], "Ha'arec" 1994, May 27, p. 8; R. Somek, *Ha'shir we'simaney ha'mors shel ha'nefesh* [Poem and spiritual signs of "Mors"], "Meazanim" 1997, August 27, (vol. 71, no 10), p. 40; A. Levi, *Likro bli liftoah et ha'sefer* [Reading without opening a book], "Kol ha'ir" 1997, May 30, p. 65; A. Revach, *Zman atid be'zman avar*, [The Future Tense in the Past Tense], "Iton 77" 1999, no 20, p. 16; A. Reich, *Maasei ha'yom – yom ke'vria mehudeshet* [Everyday creating the world from the scratch], "Ha'arec" 1999, November 10, p. 15.

which is unusual even against the background of very diversified and emerging from many sources poetry of Israel.

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One of the most interesting examples of a motif of Golgotha is Leskli's poem *The Crucified* [Ha-tzaluv], published in his posthumous volume *Dear Perverts* [Sotim yekarim], in 1994:

What image has more truth, wisdom, beauty
than the Crucified Christ in churches, cathedrals, museums,
books?
And the image
of the real Christ on a real Golgotha
what does it have
?
Flies, stench, sweat and urine.
No parable will grow here --
at best some rank, stupid weeds.

O my Lord, my Lord!⁵

The discursive nature of the poem does not obscure references to spatial categories. It may be assumed that the poem is characterized by axiological spatial juxtaposition of “up” and “down” reflecting the feud between spirituality and materialism, culture and nature, sacrum and profanum. Traditionally positive emotional associations of the “upward” concepts refer here to those works of art which participate in the “sacred”. The “downward” concepts, on the other hand, represent here “the real Golgotha” understood as the background for the “real” drama rather than as the Christian holy place⁶. The poem takes on the character of a rational reasoning: whereas the answer to the first, a bit ironic, question: “What image has

⁵ H. Leskli, *Sotim yekarim*, “BITAN” Publishers Ltd., Tel Aviv 1994, p. 15; reprinted in: *Ha`mitad shira Isralit 1990-2006*, “Helicon. Anthological Journal of Contemporary Poetry” 2006, p. 77. Transl. by E. Dargiewicz and B. Tarnowska.

⁶ As M. Eliade writes, “For the Christians, Golgotha was located in the middle of the world: it was regarded both as a peak of the cosmic mountain and a place where Adam had been created and buried”. M. Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii*, transl. J. Wierusz-Kowalski, Warszawa 1966, p. 369.

more truth, wisdom, beauty /than the Crucified Christ in churches, cathedrals, museums, / books?” seems to be obvious, the answer to the latter one: “And the image / of the real Christ on a real Golgotha / what does it have / ?” has been preceded by silence that signifies transcendental emptiness. This question indicates the lack of real connection between the empirical world and its projection in literature and art, between what is signified and signifié, mortal Jesus and a-historical, kerygmatic Christ. The next lines which are a kind of a commentary of the lyrical subject evoke “the testimony” of incompatibility of the images embedded in Christian tradition with the real act of crucifixion. The vision of martyred Christ emerging from countless pictures seems to be – as it is implied by the mode of reasoning of the lyrical subject – distant from an attempt to show what actually had happened on the cross⁷. According to Leskli, numerous interpretations with which the Christian art has been encapsulating Jesus` death seeing in it, among others, an act of God and a symbol of salvation and the sublime beauty, distort the essence of being. The dramatized composition, the beauty of winding lines, the refined colors and the depth of symbolic meanings are juxtaposed in Leskli`s poem with the pejorative unworthy issues of sacrum, that cannot be reflected in the sacral literature and art. “Flies, stench, sweat and urine” belong thus to another, lower world – the sphere of death and posthumous punishment. In the same semantic field there remains and is identified with “down” animalized grass – a material, uncreative element of the universe. Though grass, especially green, is often positively marked in the biblical tradition, as a synonym of a pasture of a messianic aspect⁸ (see: Isaiah 65,10; Ezekiel 34, 14n; Psalm 22; 94)⁹, however in Leskli`s poem “some rank, stupid weeds” mean simply grass – the biblical symbol of vanity, worthlessness and sin (“When the sinners come up like the grass, and all the workers of evil do well for themselves, it is so that their end may be eternal destruction.” Psalm 92,8; compare: Psalm 90, 5nn; Isaiah 33,11)¹⁰. A conclusion that “no parable will grow here”, makes someone think of Christ`s explanation of a parable on a weed: “And he made answer and said, He who puts the good seed in the earth is the Son of

⁷ The lack of realism, typical of the art of the early Middle Ages, which showed the Crucifixion in a symbolic way, was related both to an inclination of this epoch to an allegoric presenting of reality and to the fact that at first the Christians “were repelled – as Władysław Kopaliński writes – by an ignominy of this cruel punishment and general contempt for those who were crucified” – criminals and slaves. The representations of Christ suffering on the cross appeared as late as in the sixth century.” W. Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli*, Warszawa 1990, p. 175; compare: M. Lurker, *Die Botschaft der Symbole. In Mythen, Kulturen und Religionen*, München 1990.

⁸ Ks. T. Hergsel, *Jezus cudotwórca*, Katowice 1987, p. 159.

⁹ See: www.biblegateway.com/ - 26k

¹⁰ Compare: M. Lurker, *Słownik obrazów i symboli biblijnych*, transl. Bp K. Romaniuk, Poznań 1989, p. 247-248. A grass is also a biblical symbol of a transitory nature of a human life as well blind chance (see: Isaiah 40, 8).

man; And the field is the world; / and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom; and the evil seeds are the sons of the Evil One.” (Matthew 13, 37-38).

The vitality of the wild grass – *pars pro toto* of a self-regenerating nature, deprived of the spiritual dimension but concrete, alive, plainly immortal – seems to ironically juxtapose itself with the idea of Resurrection. Contrary to the belief of the Christians who in the mystery of the cross find the beginning of a new life and the promise of the Kingdom of Heaven, the place of the crucifixion remains here a barren wasteland, both in the material and spiritual sense. Moreover, it evokes the ancient literature concept of *locum horridum*, that is “a terrible place”, the most suitable appropriate background for sad and tragic events. One of the traits of these *loci horridi* referring to *kathabasis*, or the descent to the posthumous punishment sphere, was the scarcity of the verdant. As Teresa Michałowska writes, “Nature, if present, was manifesting itself in all its menace: among the most common images we find a stormy sea or a rocky wilderness”¹¹. The New Testament is teeming with clues as for the look and location of the site of Jesus’s torment. According to the synoptic gospels, the hilltop called Golgotha, or Skull (Hebrew: „gulgolet”, Arameic: „gulgultha”, Latin: „calva” or „calvaria”), was in an uninhabited area (Mark, 15,21; Luke 23,26; John 19,17), but close to a town (Mark, 15,21; Luke 23,26; John 19,17), a busy road (Mark 15,29) and near a garden with graves (John 19,41; 20,15). This place, in Jesus’s times “deserted, desolate and resembling a garbage dump”, “walled in from the west by vertical rocks in which the graves had been dug”¹² functions in Leskli’s poem as an equivalent to the eschatological despair. The exclamation that the poem ends with: “O my Lord, my Lord!” is not only an echo of the words of a lamenting psalmist (Psalm 22,2), or the words of Jesus dying on the cross (Mark 15, 34; Matthew 27,46), but it also conveys the violent feelings of the lyrical subject – the author’s *alter ego* (it should be additionally stressed that Jesus has been transformed here from the subject of the description into the lyrical “you”). The uncompromising stance of the artist who rejects, in the name of beauty and truth, all of the traditional conventions and meanings, are expressed here through the lament on Jesus’s suffering and probable futility of his sacrifice¹³. As Amir Or notices: “Leskli refers to art, and Jesus is for him just a symbol. I think he doesn’t see him in any religious light, but rather as a psycho-historical figure. Both of

¹¹ See: T. Michałowska, *Poetyka i poezja. Studia i szkice staropolskie*, Warszawa 1982, p. 302-303.

¹² *Hebraica – Wielki Post. ...na Golgotę*. <http://biblia.wiara.pl>

¹³ According to Or, “I don’t take it that Jesus wanted to sacrifice himself at all. For what? He had enough work to do by staying in his body. I think it was a later Christian idea. The whole story seems to be have been rather distorted. However, in the given circumstances, I wouldn’t call his choice futile in terms of personal integrity”. From a letter by Amir Or to the author of this article, dated 25th August 2007.

us don't think of him as pure spirit though, nor separate the elements that as far as I'm concerned, create the drama of Jesus as an aware spirit in this aching mortal body"¹⁴.

The Hour of Why [*She`at ha-lama*], from the poetic cycle *Hours*, from a volume *The Mice and Leah Goldberg. Poems 1989-1987* [*Ha-Achbbarim ve Lea Goldberg. Shirim 1989-1987*] which was published in 1992, is the poem in where the words of Jesus on the cross became a pretext for demonstrating a psychological situation of spurning and the lack of contact with another human being. The desperate question posed by the lyrical "ego" and repeated many times, remains unanswered since there is nobody at the other end:

Why? Why? He asks,
but doesn't know
that he is asking.
He thinks that he is saying:
hello, hello.

But at the other end
there's no Ronit
and there's no Shuki
and there's no Yochai
and there's no Orna
There is only:
Why? Why?
Only:
Why have you forsaken me?
Why have you left me
all alone?¹⁵

This poem expresses a mistrust of the poet towards the words that are a kind of cipher hiding the double meanings. As the Israeli critic Shai Dotan notices, ">halo< takes the mask off and

¹⁴ Ibidem. According to Or, "I don't take it that Jesus wanted to sacrifice himself at all. For what? He had enough work to do by staying in his body. I think it was a later Christian idea. The whole story seems to be have been rather distorted. However, in the given circumstances, I wouldn't call his choice futile in terms of personal integrity". From a letter by Amir Or to the author of this article, dated 25th August 2007.

¹⁵ H. Leskli, *Ha`Achbbarim ve Lea Goldberg. Shirim 1989-1987*, "BITAN" Publisher Ltd, Tel Aviv 1992, p. 89. Transl. by E. Dargiewicz and B. Tarnowska.

turns out to be a question >why<. The banal sound of the phone ringing, so mundane, becomes a cry for help, a painful expression of defeat”. Since, as Dotan continues, “the words can’t console, create a hermetic world of beauty nor substitute human relationships” thus, the words in Leskli’s poetry “regain their basic function which in poetry is expressing feelings”¹⁶.

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The picture of Golgotha – shown in the context of aesthetic problematic – appears also in the English poem of Amir Or *The Right View*, in the volume *The Museum of Time* (2006):

And if I would have portrayed for you
this soft bluish light
the tremulous reflection of the poplar in the water
when a convoy of ducks is crossing the pond
and beyond the circular shore line
the bushes and the bay and the green mountain
melting into the cloud-sky in the rain –

wouldn’t you search my eyes with a praying searchlight
shoot a duck or two down between the lines
and pray for the monster to emerge from the sea
and gape open upon your flesh a sky-high mouth
to redeem you

from this divine dullness?

But there’s no need. Here, I’m sketching it for you –
the cross and the nails the convulsions the pain
wave after wave in his butterfly’s wings –
your glowing faces the landscape
and finally his wonderful cry
the pleasure-strike hitting into your flesh

the quivering thrill –

Just one more minute. Patience. I’m almost

¹⁶ S. Dotan, op. cit., p. 4. Transl. by R. Jabłońska and B. Tarnowska.

finished.¹⁷

In Or's poem the landscape worthy of the brush of the most outstanding landscapists is juxtaposed with a fragmentary image of the site of Jesus's martyrdom. Whereas the first stanza of a poem, of a tight form, shows the space that is continuous and emanating peace, the rest of the poem contains only details that are building the tension and indirectly create the picture of Golgotha as an amorphous and desert land. The subject's attention is focused on the recipient who "here and now" accompanies an act of creation of a poem and simultaneously represents timeless type of a consumer of culture, whose preferences are well-defined. This consumer might be for example an enthusiast of video films, a thrill-seeker or one of spectators taking part in a "spectacular" execution of Jesus on Golgotha.

It is worth adding that "because of its effect on the audience, [Golgotha] was for the ancient Romans simply an ideal place for slaying. Its character and location guaranteed a desirable and large public. The hill of a flat top with the crosses above, lying by well-traveled departure rout to Yava and Cesarea, was a perfect repellent sign – in weekdays for a few and during holidays for several dozen thousands people"¹⁸. The ironic title of the poem refers both to the place that is chosen by an intratextual recipient (*locum horridum* as a symbol of cruelty, violence and self-destructive urge instead of *locum amoeni*) and his view on art. As the lyrical "ego" claims, the sublime art, despite its force to express the harmony and order of being, is not able to be a source of amusement, so it seems to be dreadfully boring. According to Or, the poem "is about people's refusal to beauty, serenity, nature - in life and even more so in contemporary art. The destructive powers have so much more appeal, that people don't care to pay even the price of eventual self destruction that this attitude entails. The monster can be a bizarre and sensational *epatez le bourgeois*, can be mass-media and TV culture, drugs, or Jonah's whale. Anything that serves this destructive urge"¹⁹.

In the poem which puts forward questions concerning the role of art and the place of an artist in society, the hilltop of Golgotha is a negatively valorized background of the biblical drama, and simultaneously a spatial equivalent for a self-destructive urge, cruelty and spiritual deprivation of the human kind²⁰.

¹⁷ A. Or, *The Museum of Time*, Dedalus Press, Dublin 2006, p. 5.

¹⁸ *Hebraica – Wielki Post. ...na Golgotę*. <http://biblia.wiara.pl>

¹⁹ From a letter by Amir Or to the author of this article, dated 25th August 2007.

²⁰ "A society that failed in the field of art and literature is a society that has become mentally fossilized and harmed its own abilities of self renewal and rejuvenation". *Interview with Amir Or for "Literatura na Świecie" by Beata Tarnowska*, [http://www.amiror.co.il/PDF/ENGLISH/Interviews and Critics ...](http://www.amiror.co.il/PDF/ENGLISH/Interviews%20and%20Critics...), p. 5.

Whereas the cross of torment on Golgotha – the main symbol of Christianity²¹ – was reflected in countless paintings, sculptures and literary works, the portrait of Jesus who walks on the water – an obvious sign of his divine nature – has not had so many representations. One of the examples of a polemical approach to the Christian glorification of suffering is the statement of the Israeli writer Amoz Oz: “I ask myself many times why Christianity did choose the cross for its symbol? Why did it choose an object that is an instrument of suffering? Finally I was worried by the Crucified himself – a portrait of a man who is dying in great pain. Why didn’t the Christians choose a man who walks on the water as their symbol (...) ? There are so many wonderful symbols in Christianity. But this religion chose the worst and the most tragic among them.”²².

The miracles that are ascribed by the tradition of The New Testament to the Sea of Galilee (Kinneret) – the first feeding of the multitude and fishes, and Jesus’s walking on the water²³ – are the subject of Amir Or’s poem *Miracle [Nes]*, in the volume *Faces [Panim]*, 1991:

A moon ripens in the boughs of the poplar.
Dawn wounds the eyes of the fishermen,
their arms ripple –
swifts of blood
struggling to fly out.
Dawn wounds their mouths.
A radio.
If they catch even one fish
there’s the possibility of a miracle.

Jesus walks on the water,

²¹ “Jesus is walking on the water towards his pupils >at 4 a. m.< (v. 48). In the biblical tradition this time is a moment of special activity of God. The time determined in verse 48 may be an allusion to The Old Testament, according to which the moment of overcoming the darkness of the night by the light of the rising sun is an exceptionally appropriate time for the activity of God. (...) The moment of struggling between the day and the night is often a time of Epiphany. In this perspective Jesus’s walk on the water points indirectly to His divinity”. M. Rosik, *Jezus a judaizm w świetle Ewangelii wg św. Marka*, Warszawa 2004, p. 571.

²² Oz continues: “I hate pain. (...) I don’t feel any attachment to the Christians’ hatred toward their own bodies. I want my body to be my friend. (...) A body is not a sinner. And a body is not a source of evil. Evil (...) does not come from the body”. *Śmierć nie ma zapachu. Z Amosem Ozem rozmawia Zbigniew Mikolejko*, “Literatura na Świecie” 1995, no ½, p. 351.

²³ Compare: “And Simon, answering, said, Master, we were working all night and we took nothing: but at your word I will let down the nets. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake”. Luke 5, 5; “Then Jesus took the cakes and having given praise to God, he gave them to the people who were seated, and the fishes in the same way, as much as they had need of.” John 6, 11.

his nipples brushed by a holy wind²⁴,
the holy spirit
blows on his translucent grieving phallus.

The water has a life of its own.
Nuns, round stones,
step down to bathe among the doves.
The birds tend their nakedness.
The morning is pure.

A wine-stain spreads on the lake,
morsels of bread float.
The morning is pure.²⁵

The space evoked in the poem reminds the ancient *loci amoeni* or “the nice places” that – as Teresa Michałowska writes – “bathed in sunlight and transfused with brightness”, “created a sphere favorable for life”, and its charm “enhanced also other sensual sensations: the sweet fragrance accompanied by them or the subtle sounds”²⁶. The sense of the idyllic gentleness is evoked here by accumulation of those elements of the landscape and of natural phenomena which suggest gentle sensual experiences such as the blow of the wind, the shapes of feminine bodies compared with the roundness of water-smoothed stones, the cooing of the doves²⁷ or the light of the dawn. Even the moon, which in the tradition of many cultures governs the world of the dead, takes on the shape and color of a ripe fruit, and not a sickle that would be associated with the death.

The red color is an important element that joins individual pictures. According to Wassil Kandinsky’s theory of color, a fiery and pulsing with life red color evokes “the sense of power, dash, energy, joy and triumph”, “is seen in our imagination as a color without limits

²⁴ In Hebrew the expression “holy wind” and “holy spirit” are identically conveyed by the same word *ru`ah*.

²⁵ A. Or, *Panim [Faces]*, Am Oved Publishers, Tel Aviv 1991, p. 49-50; reprinted in: idem, *Miracle. Translations from the Hebrew*, Poetry Ireland, Dublin 1998, p. 36-37. See also: A. Hirschfeld, *Miracle-Nes*, [in:] *The Modern Hebrew Poem Itself*, ed. by S. Burnshaw, T. Carmi, S. Glassman, A. Hirschfeld, E. Spicehandler, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 2003, p. 295-297; the Polish version: A. Or, *Cud*, transl. by B. Tarnowska, [in:] *Przed i Za. Antologia literacka*, ed. by A. Bykowska-Salczyńska i Z. Chojnowski, Olsztyn 2007, p. 359.

²⁶ T. Michałowska, op. cit., p. 302.

²⁷ The dove which is, as the wind, a Christian symbol of The Holy Spirit and a human soul, in this poem is a metaphor of love and hope. See also: M. Lurker, *Słownik obrazów i symboli biblijnych...*, p. 60-61.

[underlined by – B. T.], more or less material”²⁸. The reddish light of dawn, as if inducing the horizontal movement, is not only reflecting the face of the moon, but is also thickening on the glassy surface of a lake. In the poetic world, which is governed here by the upheaval of metamorphosis, the light is not only associated with blood and wine, but it also turns into blood and wine itself. Similarly, morsels of bread floating in the water are simultaneously the remnants of fish bait and body of Christ – the guarantor of Unity (compare: 1 Corinthians 11, 25; 10, 16-17). The analogy is replaced here by the identity of a substance since – according to The Gospel of Thomas – “the source of being is one”²⁹. However, the idyll is streaked with the wrestling of spirits and body which is visible in the fishermen’s efforts and the sacrifice of the nuns’ who in the name of faith are renouncing their sexual lives. As Ariel Hirschfeld writes, “The tension is acute between what is seen – light, birds, trees, fishermen – and what is sensed. All seems burdened with blood, fiercely yearning to burst the bounds of bodies and fuse with the world, as does the dawn’s light that >breaks< (wounds) >eyes< and >mouth<”³⁰.

The subtle erotica of the poem, evoked by sensual and at the same time apparently deprived of the material representation of Jesus’s body and also the stripping naked nuns, shows a conviction about the existence of Oneness in which body and spirits, masculine and feminine elements, day and night are uniting and complementing each other. Amir Or blurs a border between sacrum and profanum since – as he speaks – “the mystic and the erotic dictionaries borrowed heavily from each other, because in fact, in terms of totality they are relatives. Religions either used this or fought against it, ruling over people by dividing them against themselves, telling them that their sensual nature is sinful and contradictory to their spiritual nature. I see no contradiction here. >The profane< is profane only if you betray your potential and drive for growth and understanding. To me human experience as such is neither profane nor holy”³¹.

Due to the unification of the opposites the sense of harmony and beauty arises and a refrain that appears in the fourth and fifth stanzas heightens the contemplative and mystical character of the poem.

²⁸ See W. Kandinsky’s book *Über das Geistige in der Kunst*, published in 1912, after: M. Rzepińska, *Historia koloru w dziejach malarstwa europejskiego*, Kraków 1983, p. 546.

²⁹ See: A. Or, *I am you*, “Helicon”. *The Secret*, May 2005, no 67.

<http://www.amiror.co.il/PDF/ENGLISH/Essays/I%20AM%20YOU%20-%20reading%20in%20the%20Gospel%20of%20Thomas.pdf>

³⁰ A. Hirschfeld, *Miracle-Nes*..., p. 295-297.

³¹ *Interview with Amir Or for “Literatura na Świecie” by Beata Tarnowska*, <http://www.amiror.co.il/PDF/ENGLISH/Interviews and Critics ...>, p. 7.

Thus, the title of *Miracle* comprises a number of meanings: it is a supernatural character of the Jesus's walk on the water, described in The New Testament, and also an epiphanic beauty of the landscape, accompanied by the Revelation, and the opposite of the Eucharistic metamorphosis. On the other hand, it is worth stressing that a rather mundane event – an act of successful fishing – is named, with some irony, as a miracle. However, the irony is overcome by the dominant sense of empathy and participation in an ageless mystery of a person of Jesus who remains present “beyond time, in the passion of the nuns, the fishermen”³².

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The picture of the places of the Revelation of Jesus's divinity – Golgotha and the Sea of Galilee – in the poetry of Leskli and Or is a point of departure for the elucidation of the religious, metaphysical and aesthetic issues most notably on the notions of truth and beauty in art. The place in Leskli's poems is monochromatic range of colors. It remains lifeless, barren (nothing but the wild stupid grass would grow here) and seems to be petrified by despair. So, the place is an equivalent of the metaphysical emptiness and the lack of the eschatological hope. The poet, who is not a believer of any religion, creates an autonomous, a bit surrealistic poetic world of compensatory function where the word is of greatest importance. However, focusing poet's attention on the material of poetry is not tantamount to the autotelic notions in a narrow sense. Leskli is interested in the ontological status of the word that becomes – as in the Bible – a separate being-body and also its capabilities of expressing and hiding the meanings and emotions. The poet, who is desperately searching for the truth, love and sense, makes a cry of dying Jesus a camouflage of his own, most intimate experiences.

Whereas Leskli is interested mainly in the exploration of his own “ego”, as well in an aesthetic dimension of the work of art, Amir Or is absorbed mainly in a super-personal reality in which the unity of the opposites and the lack of dualism become synonyms for the harmony of being. In his poems Amir Or draws extensively, among others, on the pre-Judaic, Hindu and Greek traditions³³, the polemics with a spirit-body was hidden. That polemics is characteristic especially of Christianity though also present in Judaism. In the light of the

³² From a letter by Amir Or to the author of this article, dated 31st July 2007.

³³ According to Mike Scheidemann, “Amir Or is intensely curious about religion, and it certainly isn't orientated around Judaism. For him, God is a presence, not an all-embracing Father. Or is equally drawn to paganism and the matriarchal religions of Egypt, ancient Greece and Rome, though organized religion is only of intellectual interest to him. He teaches comparative religion, but his real religion, his most complete commitment, is perhaps to poetry”. *Steeped in Tradition. Mike Scheidemann talks to Amir Or*, “The Jerusalem Post” 1996, August 22, p. 5.

poet's beliefs, Jesus – an enlightened master who “can't be called Jewish or Christian”, from the Gospel of Thomas – becomes an exponent of the faith in an immanent unity of the universe. As the poet shows, a truly spiritual dimension cannot be reduced to the notions that are typical of any institutionalized religion³⁴.

Summary

Golgotha and the Galilee Lake in the contemporary Israeli Poetry – on the example of the selected poems of Hezi Leskli and Amir Or

The article presents the motifs of Golgotha and the Galilee Lake in the modern Israeli poetry on the example of the selected poems of Hezi Leskli and Amir Or.

Contrary to Christian tradition, Jesus is shown here as a man, an enlightened master who “can't be called Jewish or Christian” and a brother rather than God. The description of the places of the Revelation of Jesus's divinity is – in the poetry of Leskli and Or – a point of departure for the elucidation of the religious, metaphysical and aesthetic issues, most notably on the notions of truth and beauty in art. For Leskli, who was not a believer of any religion, Golgotha is an equivalent of the metaphysical emptiness and the lack of the eschatological hope. Whereas Leskli is interested mainly in the ontological status of the word that becomes – as in the Bible – a separate being-body and the exploration of his own “ego, as well in an aesthetic dimension of the work of art, Amir Or is absorbed mainly in a super-personal reality in which the unity of the opposites and the lack of dualism become synonyms for the harmony of being. In the light of the poet's beliefs, Jesus becomes an exponent of the faith in an immanent unity of the universe.

³⁴ “As he's quoted in GT, we're all sons of God and ultimately we're all one, but Jesus was an enlightened master who experienced it and taught it. Yes, he was born and brought up a Jew, spoke to Jews with Jewish terminology and sense, but true spiritual insight can't be reduced to terms of organized religions, such as Judaism, Islam or... Christianity. He can't be called Jewish or Christian. He was neither”. “I also think we live many lives, and some of us have been Christians, know the feelings etc”. From a letter by Amir Or to the author of this article, dated 31st July 2007.

