

## The Leah Aini Project: Literature as an Act of Survival

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I.

The Hebrew entry for Leah Aini in the *Lexicon of Modern Hebrew Literature*, a project initiated by Ohio State University,<sup>1</sup> opens as follows:

Aini (1962). Writer, born in Tel Aviv to a Holocaust survivor father from Salonika and a Nashdidani mother, so that she grew up in the shadow of two extinct languages: Ladino and Aramaic.

Following the Hebrew entry are a few lines in English. Before I read them, I was sure that I would encounter a direct translation of the Hebrew text. But I found a different text, which opens as follows: "Leah Aini (1962). A writer, born in Tel-Aviv. Published nine books of adults, two collections of poems, and six books for children and youth."

The difference between these two texts seems to indicate that the editors of the *Lexicon* assumed that the information on the ethnic origin of Aini's parents, the fact that her father was a Holocaust survivor from Salonika (that is, that he survived Auschwitz), and the status of their nearly-extinct mother tongues was relevant only to readers of Hebrew. "General readers," those who read Aini in translation, can be satisfied with limited information that includes the author's

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<sup>1</sup> <http://library.osu.edu/projects/hebrew-lexicon/00513.php>

name and birth year and lists her works according to genre.

And yet, those who are familiar with Aini's opus know that the lines that are missing from the English text include vast quantities of volatile biographical-psychological and social-cultural baggage. Identifying this volatile material and recognizing its great importance is, I believe, a precondition of any project that attempts to understand Aini's artistic drive and its fruits.

In this context, I would like to present two fundamental arguments and try to clarify and consolidate them. My first argument is—and I apologize for the daring and perhaps even the audacity inherent in it—that the whole of Aini's artistic project shows that she inherited from her father— although, as we shall see, only partially—the image of the world that was imposed on him in Auschwitz.<sup>2</sup> I refer to an image of a world made, as David Gurevitz and Dan Arav so aptly discussed,<sup>3</sup> in the pattern of the Panopticon, that is, a closed space consisting of two main units: a central control tower, which deals with monitoring and surveillance twenty-four hours a day, and a community of passive people upon whom surveillance procedures and monitoring are carried out.

The Panopticon, the brainchild of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), has been perceived in recent decades as an invention typical of eighteenth-century European rationalism. It reached the peak of perfection and distortion in Nazi

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<sup>2</sup> See also in this context Hannah Naveh *Yisraeliut Beyn Zichron Hashoah Veshichecha: Dor Rishon, Dor Sheini Bisipura Hakatzar shel Leah Aini 'Ad Sheya'avur Ha Mishmar' "* (Israeliness between Holocaust Memory and Forgetting: First Generation, Second Generation in Leah Aini's short story 'Until the Entire Guard has Passed'). *Bikoret Uparshanut* 34 (2000), 114-145 and Batya Shimony, "Resisting the Father's Narrative: A Study of Leah Aini's *Vered Ha-Levanon*," *Prooftexts* 32 (2012), 89-114.

<sup>3</sup> David Gurevitz and Dan Arav, *Encyclopedia of Ideas* [Hebrew]. (Tel Aviv: Babel, 2012), 196.

philosophy and practices. In the philosophy of Michel Foucault,<sup>4</sup> the Panopticon is a model of monitoring and suppression, operated by representatives of the overt or covert centralist regime.

The Panopticon, Gurevitz and Arav add, "is not only an architectural invention, but also a symbol of a general mechanism of knowledge that operates the one-way power of the prisoners inside it. It preserves relations of domination and hierarchy and subjugates any tendency to difference, multiplicity, movement and wandering."<sup>5</sup>

We can Learn about the relevance of the Panopticon to the world of Aini from almost explicit occurrences in her stories. This becomes cLeahr, for example, in several sections of her book *Anak, Malka, Veoman Hamischakim* (Giant, Queen, and the Master of Games).<sup>6</sup> The plot of this book is designed in the form of a metaphysical drama or gothic tale anchored in the Israeli reality. The main protagonist of the story, Nimrod, is young and creative, trying to find his way in the world by attempting to break through the thicket of relationships in an "alternative family." This family, similar in several significant ways to his original family, includes three figures that have, along with their realistic features, metaphysical features as well. The father, Gabriel Salvatore, also functions as a god.<sup>7</sup> His daughter, with whom Nimrod falls in love, is a saleswoman in a bread

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<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, "Panopticism". Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (eds.), *Visual Culture: The Reader*, (London: Sage, 1999), 61-71.

<sup>5</sup> Gurevitz and Arav, *Encyclopedia of Ideas*, 196. Translation: Hannah Adelman Komy Ofir

<sup>6</sup> Leah Aini, *Anak, Malka, Veoman Hamischakim* (Giant, Queen, and the Master of Games), (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> The divine-messianic dimension of this character is cLeahrly alluded to in his first name and surname.

shop. Her name is "Goral" (fate), and this is also her role. The brother, Samael,<sup>8</sup> helps her in the shop, and also serves as the Angel of Death.

The relevance of the concept of the Panopticon in Aini's world becomes very clear when we read how the narrator describes the worldview of "her" Angel of Death:

Samael did not like those who wandered off to **paths on which they were not intended to walk... Human characteristics such as daring, ingenuity, and courage were contemptible to him.**

The flow of his work was **planned in advance, devoid of any spiritual powers, and each one would have to know his place, until it was written to Samael to do otherwise.**<sup>9</sup>

Death, in this story, means order, method, and strict hierarchy, based on cLeahr's commands documented in writing. The conclusion is chilling when the Panopticon arises in its ultimate performance: the concentration camp.

In contrast, life, that is, all that Samael despises, means here: people wandering off on "paths on which they were not intended to walk" or those ... "who saw in their work [...] a real Creation of the Universe."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This is the name used in the Talmud, in *midrashim*, and in the literature of the Kabbalah to refer to Satan and the Angel of Death.

<sup>9</sup> Leah Aini, *Anak, Malka, Veoman Hamischakim*, 127 (emphases mine) (Translation: Hannah Adelman Komy Ofir).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

My second argument is that the struggle between the representatives of order (death) and those who rebel includes a significant political-economic aspect. It is always a struggle between the haves and the have-nots, between those who control economic capital and those who have no share in it.

Thus, for example, in Aini's *Anak, Malka, Veoman Hamischakim*, the ongoing struggle between Samael and Nimrod, who is named, apparently, after the biblical Nimrod, seen by the sages as an archetypical rebel against God,<sup>11</sup> has a clear economic side. Samael's family is a wealthy, bourgeois, while Nimrod's family is poor, broken, and shattered, living on the margins of the city.<sup>12</sup>

The Panopticonic worldview, with its two traumatic sources, the syndrome of second-generation Holocaust survivors and the syndrome of the second-generation deprived community, has provided the socio-psychological background for Aini's artistic/philosophical project for over two decades. The essence of her literary project, as I understand it, is to create a varied, frequently changing arsenal of practices of resistance to the "central control tower"—an arsenal whose aim is to provide the characters, the author, and the readers who "go along with it" seemingly real literary spaces, of (temporary) survival and an aspiration to freedom and creativity.

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<sup>11</sup> See also the entry "Nimrod" in Menachem Solieli and Moshe Barkoz, (Eds.) *Lexicon Mikrai* (Lexicon Biblicum). (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1965), 655.

<sup>12</sup> This is the place to mention that critics and authors of Israeli literature have very infrequently addressed the socioeconomic issues and their myriad effects on the personal, familial, and community levels. These issues, when they have appeared, have immediately been connected to the matter of the hegemony of the Ashkenazi community and the relative inferiority of other ethnic communities in Israeli society in connection with the national-Zionist narrative. Aini's fiction forces upon us a discussion that does not avoid this link, but neither does it relinquish other connections, such as poverty as predestined, poverty as an ethical situation, poverty and knowledge, and others.

## II.

Aini's arsenal of survival and freedom consists of two types of practices: offensive and defensive. The purpose of the offensive practices is to "steal" reserves of power, primarily reserves of knowledge, to instill fear through terrorism, and to offer alternative, subversive social models.

The purpose of the defensive practices, which consist mainly of evasion and disappearance, is to create a spatial refuge from the rule of the Panopticon. We can call these spaces, following Michel de Certeau,<sup>13</sup> "resistant spaces," or, following Hakim Bey:<sup>14</sup> T.A.Z.s—temporary autonomous zones.

All of Leah Aini's stories are filled with practices that involve stealing reserves of power, especially reserves of knowledge that the protagonists seize from their owners, usually by fraudulent means. Gila, the heroine of the novel *Mishehi Tzricha Lihiot Kan* (Someone Must be Here),<sup>15</sup> is trying to find some inner freedom by converting 'reality'—the murky reality that was imposed on her—to literature—having Kafka and Ann Mather as companions instead of the miserable people who live in her neighborhood. In order to achieve this goal, she consistently and systematically steals books from the miserable book store where she works.

Theft, fraud, and forgery are the main contents of the toolbox of Leah/Vered—the heroine of *Vered Halevanon* (Rose of Lebanon),<sup>16</sup> Aini's

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<sup>13</sup> Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>14</sup> Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone* (New York: Autonomedia, 1985).

<sup>15</sup> Leah Aini, *Mishehi Tzricha Lihiot Kan* (Someone Must be Here) (Hakibbutz Hameuchad: Tel Aviv, 1995).

<sup>16</sup> Leah Aini, *Vered Halevanon* (Rose of Lebanon) (Or Yehuda: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2010).

monumental autobiographical novel.<sup>17</sup> Thus, among other things, she cheats her father at cards and buys books with the pennies she wins (there are only two books in the house). She receives a scholarship by deceptive means from an organization of immigrants from Iraq, when she introduces herself as Leah Aini spelled with the Hebrew letter *ayin*—a name of Iraqi Jewish origin—that is, the name of someone from a community that fits well into Israeli society, rather than Aini spelled with the Hebrew letter *aleph*, the name of someone from a deprived community.<sup>18</sup>

This practice of robbery, or, to borrow once again from de Certeau's concepts, the practice of "invasion," reaches its climax in her stealing, both as a member of the second generation of Holocaust survivors and as a member of the second generation of a deprived community, her father's Holocaust story and the story of Yonatan, who represents the ruling Israeli Ashkenazi elite. Regarding the father—indeed he asks her to tell his story, but she takes control of it and tells it in her own way. Yonatan is unable to speak, and she serves as his mouthpiece, but, again, in her own way.

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<sup>17</sup> Aini's practice of faking in her autobiographical novel is apparent from the first page, when she introduces herself to Yonatan, the soldier who shot himself before his unit entered Lebanon and who she intends to care for, as "Vered" (Rose). This "stolen," supposedly illegitimate name, "invades" the title of the novel *Rose of Lebanon*, which is the official address of the gateway to its fictional world. It is worth noting that this title serves as a kind of hybrid entity that includes the "stolen" name (Vered), which Leah Aini prefers to her real name, and the geo-political space that Yonatan refused to enter (Lebanon). In what follows, I will discuss this central phenomenon in Aini's philosophical literary world.

<sup>18</sup> The protagonist's trick here of switching the letter *aleph* with the letter *ayin* in her surname is connected to an additional semantic-sociological issue. The original name of the author's father is "Yayni," a common Jewish Salonikan Greek name. The clerk who registered him in Israel changed his name to "Aini." This name, which means "I don't exist" in Hebrew, became, for the author, a symbolic expression of the act of exclusion and erasure by the Zionist Israeli establishment against the "rejected" cultures from which her parents came (Salonikan and Nashdidani) and against her as the offspring of the representatives of those cultures. This point becomes clear in several of Aini's lectures and press interviews, for example, "Leah Aini: *Meeting the Author. Between East and West Conference*, Heidelberg, Germany. 25.4.2013.

The practice of robbing or "invading" significant sites of power is the central axis of the plot in the novel *Ashtoret*,<sup>19</sup> one of the most brilliant works of Israeli fiction ever to be published. This is the story of Boaz Ashtoret, a communications executive and a widower who suffers from impotence, whose world collapses when his tongue suddenly begins to grow longer. This is also a story full of provocative sexual scenes of all kinds, creating a pornographic redundancy that can be interpreted as a component of a general poetic move that aims to present a grotesque image of the Israeli male macho experience.

However, such a reading ignores the main point. Because, in fact, it is not at all the story of Boaz Ashtoret, but rather the story of the son, Itai, a "sidewalk student" in the Far East, his girlfriend Keren, who appears at Ashtoret's home asking him to fund her abortion and help her find her lost brother, and other different and bizarre people, all of whom are fed, in a real and metaphorical way, by Ashtoret's body, his property, his connections, and his knowledge. Thai twins—wandering cooks who have been fired—surpass everyone else by cutting off a slice of Ashtoret's tongue, frying it and eating it with great appetite.

Indeed, the name Ashtoret (beginning with the Hebrew letter *aleph*), is a deliberate castration name of the name Ashtoret (beginning with the Hebrew letter *ayin*), the Canaanite goddess of fertility.<sup>20</sup> Everyone "nurses" from him, as they do from her. "Everyone" here, is all the "global refuse" celebrating on the fat body of this representative of the elite, whose creative/sexual power is lost to him

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<sup>19</sup> Leah Aini, *Ashtoret* [Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> See also the entry "Ashtoreth" in Menachem Solieli and Moshe Barkoz, *Lexicon Mirkrai*, 719.



and whose only value now consists of serving as "growth medium" for "pirates" and "barbarians".

III.

But Aini, as I've mentioned, is not satisfied with pirate invasions aimed at obtaining the assets that her protagonists were prevented from having. Her stories are filled with practices designed to intimidate through terror<sup>21</sup> while offering subversive social models to replace the established models.

In fact, it is possible to imagine Aini's whole artistic project as a major attack on the sacred symbolic sites of bourgeois society, on the one hand, and the aggressive nation-state, on the other. Thus, among other things, in her first novel, *Geut Ha-Hol* (Sand Tide),<sup>22</sup> she attacks the mythology of widowhood and bereavement in Israel, describing a processing of mourning that is utterly different from the accepted norm. The novel's heroine, Miri, widowed by her husband, Yishai, who was killed when he stepped on a mine during his reserve duty, decides to continue live with him... as a dead man.

In general, Aini always prefers "others" who are located at life's margins—the, strange, the crazy, and the rejected. This is a cLeahr line of her work, and was apparent in the first stories in *Giborei Kaitz* (The Seahorse Race)<sup>23</sup> (1991), in which she praises desperate characters whose struggle against their surroundings is hopeless and whose world borders on insanity.

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<sup>21</sup> Yuval Noah Harari identifies terror as "political violence that is intended to instill fear and confusion and cause the enemy to act, without causing serious damage [...]." "This does not mean," he adds, that terror is unimportant or lacks power. Terror is absolutely able to shock countries and whole international systems. However, its power and importance derive almost exclusively from psychological elements." Yuval Noah Harari, "Teror Maheu? Meyamei Habeyniam Vead Hamea Haesrim Vaachat" (What is Terror?: From the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century, *Zmanim* 108, (2009), 10-21.

<sup>22</sup> Leah Aini, *Geut Ha-Hol* (Sand Tide) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1992).

<sup>23</sup> Leah Aini, *Giborei Kaitz*, (The Seahorse Race) (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1991).

These anti-heroes act in an extremely violent manner. They repeatedly violate taboos of all kinds— theft, incest, impersonation, and even murder and cannibalism— but, and this is most important here, they are not presented as immoral, but rather as acting from a legitimate desire to survive.

This is how, for example, the actions of Neder (which means "vow" in English), the protagonist of *Sdommel*,<sup>24</sup> are perceived in this novella, which presents a subversive female reading of the sacrifice of Isaac. Neder experienced severe sexual abuse at the hands of her father, a police officer, and was not supported by her mother, who chose to remain silent. After her father's death she takes revenge on her mother. She injects her with poison, irons her, chops up the body, and throws the pieces to the lionesses at the safari zoo— a series of violent acts that are not perceived as lacking legitimacy.

The bourgeois concept of relationships is a central focus of Aini's attacks. The centrality of this topic is not accidental, but rather the result of her accurate perception that relationships are the fundamental building block of any social system, and that harming them causes harm to the whole of the social structure.

In contrast to most writers of modern Hebrew fiction, who created "human engineering" whose purpose was to produce an improved normative Jewish-Hebrew society,<sup>25</sup> Aini creates an "engineering" deliberately based on non-normative combinations, which often result, from the perspective of normative society, in "monsters"—that is, hybrid creatures, whose very supposedly

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<sup>24</sup> Leah Aini, *Sdommel* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2002).

<sup>25</sup> For details on this issue, see my book *Hayadata et Haaretz Sham Halimon Poreach?: Handasat Haadam Veitzuv Hamerhav Hehadash* (Do you Know the Land Where the Lemon Blooms?: Human Engineering and Designing the New Space) (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 2007).

monstrous existence poses a serious threat to the concepts of order, selection, and classification of the ruling establishment.<sup>26</sup>

A perfect example of this process occurs in the novella *Susit* (Horsey)<sup>27</sup> (2012), Aini's latest book. This is the story of Sasha, a woman of equine origin and Hiron, a centaur. They are presented as a legitimate alternative couple, whose skills are seen as much superior to those of ordinary human couples. The story of Sasha and Hiron, it must be stated and emphasized, is presented explicitly as an alternative story, that is, a story in which the relationship option it proposes is considered a basic building block that is better than the normative kind.

This becomes clear from, among other things, the alternative history of living creatures that Hiron, the centaur, presents to Sasha, from whom this information has been kept during her thirty-seven years of life.

"In the earliest times,"<sup>28</sup> Hiron reads from his holy book, "when all divine creatures stayed with their own species and mated with each other, one species, the important one, came to believe that it had divine truth and power."<sup>29</sup> This species, normative humans, limited itself to mating between human males and females. And then, read Hiron, "stupidity and boredom descended on the world, and boredom brought with it covetousness, which led to strife, which was harnessed to injustice, which led to mass, futile death."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Hakim Bey provides fascinating examples in this context. See his chapter "Gone to Croatan" in *T.A.Z.*, 114-121.

<sup>27</sup> Leah Aini, *Susit* (Horsey) (Or Yehuda: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir. 2012). (translation by Hannah Adelman Komy Ofir)

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

This separatist mating behavior must be replaced by a different behavior, open to all mating options and couplings between all living things. So it is explicitly stated by the "divine voice" and written in the alternative holy writings that Hiron reads to Sasha:

Everyone look at the new human family and again hear the divine voice: 'For on this day I united species with other species, and I split them into four elements, and they will all be sons and daughters of a repaired family, fertilizing and reproducing lineages combined of halves, and mixed in quarters and quarters of quarters and thirds of thirds, sex and race, religion and color ... for the universe is a land of liberty, and there is one breath in it, and such is the secret of the legend of life, the speech of divinity.<sup>31</sup>

#### IV.

The hybridization of materials not usually combined with one another, or in other words, following the ideas of Claude Lévi-Strauss<sup>32</sup> and their development by post-modern thinkers, primarily Derrida,<sup>33</sup> *bricolage*, the "illegitimate" mixing of materials, which also characterizes the syntax of Aini's micro-text,<sup>34</sup> functions in her fiction simultaneously in both the offensive and the defensive planes.

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<sup>31</sup> Leah Aini, *Susit*, 136. (translation: Hannah Adelman Komy Ofir)

<sup>32</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss. *Savage Thinking*. Trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966 [1962]).

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alan Bass, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul [1967], 1978), 285.

<sup>34</sup> This stylistic phenomenon—which requires a separate discussion—creates a multi-layered, syntactical semantic fabric that is at once pathetic and parodic. This phenomenon is especially apparent in Aini's

In the offensive plane, it serves as a threat to the very logic and validity of normative "genetic engineering." On the defensive plane, it serves as a "protean device" that grants to characters who seek to escape the eye of the "control tower" the ability to continually change shape. Indeed, many of Aini's characters have elusive, chameleonic identities. Furthermore, they tend to assume the identities of others,<sup>35</sup> and are in perpetual motion—a kind of nomadism, which in itself, as several researchers have demonstrated,<sup>36</sup> presents a serious threat to what is considered "settled" society.

These unconventional hybridizations, the protean and nomadic traits, are consistent with the circus-like, carnival nature of Aini's world,<sup>37</sup> on the one hand, and with the grotesque parallax of her writing, on the other. The combination of these creates a counter-network (what Hakim Bey calls a web) within the established network, making possible the (temporary) existence of cities of refuge.

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typical carnivalistic texts, first and foremost *Ashtoret* and *Susit*. In these texts, a total corporeal celebration is created, reminiscent of the one in the Rablais' monumental work *Gargantua and Panatagruel*—the book on which Bakhtin based his thesis on the carnival. See Mikhail Bakhtin. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984 [1965]).

<sup>35</sup> Examples of this phenomenon include the above-mentioned case of Leah/Vered Aini in *Vered Halevanon*, who wins a scholarship using the name Leah Aini, and Nimrod in *Anak, Malka, Veoman Hamishchakim*, whose face, described as that of "a poet who has lost his way, a suburban prince, a game artist," flickers from the face of Goral—his lover and the author who his writing his biography—which he controls with his voice. Another example is Gila, from *Mishehi Tzricha Lihot Kan*, who is a kind of horror film version of Pippi Longstocking, freely entering and exiting the real world and the fictional world, changing shape, exchanging live characters for fabricated ones, and vice-versa, all in a loopy whirlwind from which she attempts/refuses to escape through extremely violent actions.

<sup>36</sup> See Hannah Naveh, *Nosim Venosot: Sipurai Masa Basifrut Haivrit Hamodernit* (Women and Men Travelers: Travel Narratives in Modern Hebrew Literature) (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 2002), 96-120; Yigal Schwartz, *Hayadata et Haaretz Sham Halimon Poreach?: Handasat Haadam Veitzuv Hamerhav Hehadash*, 367-469; Gilles Deleuze, & Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus*, University of Minnesota Press (Minneapolis & London:1987), 381; Stephanie Golden. *The Women Outside: Meanings and Myths of Homelessness*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Oxford: University of California Press) 1992.

<sup>37</sup> See also note 34, above.

When I talk about "cities of refuge" in Aini's work, I refer, for example, to the independent space, seemingly unbelievable, that the soldier Leah/ Vered creates for herself in *Vered Halevanon* in the basic training camp—a definitive Israeli panopticonic space. All around, the world is involved in intensive activities based on strict hierarchy, order and uniformity, and, of course, complete knowledge of the location and condition of every one of the new recruits. Nonetheless, Leah/Vered succeeds, through her practices of camouflage and invisibility, to manage her own life, mainly lying in bed and reading, without anyone - for a while - sensing her absence.<sup>38</sup>

The use of the protean device is a means that also serves the author, Leah Aini, exactly as it serves her protagonists. The difference in their actions is the identity the "control tower," with which they are actually conducting the struggle in actuality. The protagonists trick the representatives of the state and the army and the socioeconomic elites. Leah Aini also tricks all of these, but through the literary establishment.

In his essay "*Ashtoret Vehatikshoret: Al Roman Echad Shel Leah Aini* " (*Ashtoret and the Media: On One of Leah Aini's Novels*," Ran Yagil<sup>39</sup> writes the following apt lines:

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<sup>38</sup> Leah/Vered creates for herself here, as she did in the past of the story and will do in the future of the story, a closed space inside and outside of the public space. This space parallels the space that the giant creates around himself in her favorite story, "The Selfish Giant," before he opens his gates to the local children, of course. Leah Aini, *Vered Halevanon*, 80.

<sup>39</sup> Ran Yagil "Ashtoret Vehatikshoret: Al Roman Echad Shel Leah Aini" (*Ashtoreth and the Media: On One of Leah Aini's Novels*), Bananas, blog, 24.8.2008.

The collection of Aini's realistic-surrealistic characters throughout the novel ... an endless catalog, full and rich, delivers another kick to the literary establishment that tried to confine her in a suitable niche ... but, just like the tongue of her protagonist Ashtoret, she does not want to sit on the palate determined for her by the literary establishment.

[She is] a kind of arrogant writer who does not want to recycle her special method time after time as other writers do... Look at her—she wants to innovate, initiate, rise and fall, gamble, she is shameless!

Yagil is correct—Aini relates to the literary "control tower" in the same manner in which her characters relate to the "control tower" that oversees them, disciplines their lives, deprives them of freedom, creativity, and... life.

Nimrod, in *Anak, Malka, Veoman Hamischakim*, succeeds in deceiving Samael, the Angel of Death and representative of method, order, and immobility, by means of a creative change of form. He comes out of the letter that Goral wrote in his name—his face joins hers, creating, in Aini's unique way, a hybrid creature—and reads his words:

So now—the author's [Goral's] smile seemed to challenge—"I see it as an obligation to read precisely from my protagonist's letter." She cleared her throat, opened the book, and shook a sheet of paper out of it. Her face,

which became suffused with blood, a profusion of blood, began to reflect, amazingly, another face—everyone saw—an altogether different face: a handsome masculine face that flickered from within...the face of a poet who has lost his way, a suburban prince, a master of games... proudly Nimrod held his slightly sooty face toward the crowd, and read in a metallic voice.<sup>40</sup>

Leah Aini, like Nimrod, deceives the representatives of the powerful establishment by means of amazing, constant, creative shape-changing. She invents power anew in each of her books, creating for herself and for us a (temporary) space of freedom.

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<sup>40</sup> Leah Aini, *Anak, Malka, Veoman Hamischakim*, 140-141. (translation: Hannah Adelman Komy Ofir)