

WebMail - [TelAvivLetters] cafe moment letter 34 (2nd improved version-please read)

Delete	File	Create	Reply	Reply All	Forward	Previous	Next	Options	Index
Help									

Date Sent: Friday, June 14, 2002 3:49 PM

From: TelAvivLetters-owner@yahoogroups.com

Add to Address Book

To: TelAvivLetters <TelAvivLetters@yahoogroups.com>

Subject: [TelAvivLetters] cafe moment letter 34 (2nd improved version-please read)

Status: Urgent New

----- Yahoo! Groups Sponsor ----->
 Will You Find True Love?
 Will You Meet the One?
 Free Love Reading by phone!
<http://us.click.yahoo.com/Deo18C/zDLEAA/Ey.GAA/JQbslB/TM>
 ----->

CAFE MOMENT

Sitting shivah is a great literary device. Seymour Simckes (Seven Days of Morning), Yaakov Shabtai (Past Continuous), Philip Roth (The Counterlife), among others, have exploited the shivah in order to bring together under a single roof the far flung mishpokhe, there to stage the unfinished business of the family in the Aristotelian way. Who needs novelistic devices, I ask you, who needs Aristotle, when life itself supplies the best-laid plot? Soon after my arrival here in Israel, Cafe Moment, symbol of the Good Life, was blown up by a suicide bomber, who scouted out the neighborhood for the busiest night spot, and here I am, on the eve of my departure, having dinner at Cafe Moment with my larger-than-life friend, Suzi. If that isn't enough, just as Suzi took me, three-and-a-half months ago, to a makeshift Evening of Russian Folklore, we now have tickets to the closing folk and rock concert of the Israel Festival, to be held in the Sultan's Pool.

Cafe Moment has never looked so good. Unlike other cafes. where the security gate casts a giant shadow, Cafe Moment's green steel gate blends in nicely with the decors. Every security guard now carries the same metal detector, but according to Suzi, this guy has "real" Secret Service training. How she knows this I don't know. The prices are about average; the portions--huge. I order cheese ravioli, because we have a long night ahead, and Suzi orders the Greek salad, because she's trying to lose weight. A stranger walking in would never guess what transpired here. It's still too early to know whether there will there be a line around the block. Probably not. That's where suicide bombers like to hide.

Security is tight around the entrances to Sultan's Pool. No one minds the double searches. There's a festive mood in the air. Real chairs have been set out in the orchestra this time, instead of benches, and in typical Israeli fashion, the seats start

filling up only five minutes before the show, which starts promptly, because this evening's festivities are being broadcast live over Channel Three. The front section has been set aside for special needs people in wheelchairs. If they weren't deaf when they came, they may need hearing aids tomorrow. All around Suzi and me, people are using their cell phones to signal friends who are only now arriving, and normally, this would annoy me no-end, but this is no ordinary concert, and the moment it begins, I burst into tears. Have you ever cried for two hours and ten minutes straight, with music blasting in your ears? It isn't easy.

Honestly, I didn't come here to cry, and certainly no one else seems so inclined. Yet it's unavoidable. Seven thousand people have assembled under a single sky, and they know the lyrics to every song. Pretty soon, they'll be dancing in the aisles, combining swaying motions, as seen on MTV, with the old-fashioned hora, and sitting in what used to be No Man's Land a mere 35 years ago, you are living the miracle, the more so, because three-and-a-half months ago, no one, not even the greatest optimist, would have imagined such a turnout for an open-air concert in Jerusalem, and you are crying because these are new songs, which this youthful audience knows from listening to Galei Zahal, not to the classical music station, and because until half-time, none of the performers is over thirty, and what a distance this country has traveled in the course of your lifetime, what a quantum leap from the so-called Army Troupes, those kids performing Zionist songs in khaki uniforms, and this glitzy show, with strobe lights and other rock concert effects, and with everyone singing and clapping along, the performers can defer to the audience during some parts of the song, the songs that are but a build-up to the star appearance, by Miki Gavrilov, to whom this concert is a tribute, and boy, does he know how to work the crowd! A good thing the music is playing so loud and the lights are out when Miki starts singing "Hakhnisini tahat kenafeikh," Bialik's famous love poem, which you once had to memorize in the Ashkenazi pronunciation for Chaim Brandwein's course in modern Hebrew literature at Brandeis, but which everyone-everyone knows by heart by virtue of being Israeli, yet it's impossible to sing along if you're sobbing so hard, because if this isn't a miracle, then what is, seven thousand people singing a Hebrew love song written in the 1890s, when there weren't seven thousand people in the whole world who read modern Hebrew poetry, and who cares if it doesn't scan in Israeli Hebrew if the music is so haunting, and for your brother's sake you're crying, your brother who loved Israel and loved popular music, as everyone here has a brother who didn't make it, and how he would have laughed when Miki calls up the superannuated members of his original, Lahakat ha-Churchilim, which translates (I think) The Churchill Singers, who thirty years ago introduced American rock to Israel and who now perform ear-splitting renditions of their original, English-language, repertoire, and the concert reaches a resounding finale when all the performers come on stage and sing Miki's most famous song, "Ani ve-ata neshaneh et ha-olam," last heard at a Yom Hazikkaron ceremony on the Tel Aviv University campus, and everyone is standing now, singing this song, even though there are not supposed to be any songs that all Israelis still sing, and you are crying because this is something worth living for, something worth dying for.

Jerusalem, June 13, 2002

David G. Roskies
Department of Jewish Literature
Jewish Theological Seminary
3080 Broadway