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The Mark of Fire

Forty years of writing about The Yom Kippur War

1. A Silent Understanding

The immediate literary response to The Yom Kippur War was produced in the form of poetry. Many of the poems written and published in the weeks and months following the war captured feelings of paralyzing astonishment, shock, and the difficulty to comprehend the confounding switch from a tranquil routine to a calamity that threatens one's very existence. "Suddenly, a door opened", wrote Avot Yeshurun in "The Poem about the Africans" ("HaShir Al HaAfrikim"), describing the urgent exit of a reserve soldier, wearing a praying shawl, from within the temple in the midst of prayer. "A soldier dragged the reservist outside. / took off the praying shawl from street to street, listening to the soldier's tale [...] the two reservists walked to the Great Rift Valley". Yoav Porat demonstrated this in his poem "The First Wounded" ("Et HaPatsua HaRishon"), written from a combat medic's point of view, struggling to adapt to what his eyes are seeing: "The first wounded/ I bandaged desperately/ baffled. Then came more. Then came more. Then came more. And more, and more..." Arieh Sachs described, in his poem "October 1973", the actual and symbolic moment of the dying of the lights under the blackout decree, leading to a sudden comprehension: "Now that the lights are dying, we know/ the war is real."

These three examples are taken from the anthology "A Place of Fire" ("Makom Shel Esh"), containing, according to its editors, poems "that have been selected from both newspapers and periodicals published between October 1973 and May 1974". Twenty nine writers took part in this collection, young and old, men and women, soldiers and civilians. Among them were two of the fallen soldiers whose poems could be said to prophesy their own deaths ("God Almighty" [Ribono Shel Olam"] by Be'eri Hazak and "My Death Came Abruptly" ["Moti Ba Li Petta"] by Yosef Sarig).

With time, the poetic response to The Yom Kippur War diversified and expanded. The following decade saw the successive publications of significant poem collections, processing impressions of the war in broader and deeper frames of experience, description and thought. These include books by Avot Yeshurun, Haim Gouri, Elisha Porat, Reuven Ben-Yosef, Yehuda Amichai, Yehiel Hazak and Shlomo Wiener. This poetry fulfilled its authentic function as a seismograph, detecting disturbance signals in real time. This is both its strength and its limitation. Just as in other cases of traumatic events, it has left the delayed multilayered confrontation with the war's experiences and its resonance to other channels of expression – headed by literary prose of all kinds, fiction and nonfiction. Indeed, narrative prose has been the main medium used in Hebrew literature in confronting The Yom Kippur War – an ongoing confrontation these past four decades.

The first to attempt representation of the war in fiction was Dan Ben-Amotz, in his novel "What a Wonderful War" ("Yofi Shel Milhama"). This book was written incredibly swiftly and was published in February 1974 (!). It is based upon a typical “Brenner-like” device: In the introduction the author informs his readers that he only presents an authentic manuscript written by one of the fallen, and that he himself is

simply the editor and publisher of an actual account of the battlefield. However, in the final chapter he "confesses" to have fabricated the entire story, and explains that the introduction served only to lead the reader into believing in the authenticity of the events described. The plot itself is based on a confessional monologue of a combat medic named Enosh, and spun around a bizarre liaison during a brief leave in Tel Aviv in the midst of the war with another soldier's wife, that he visited in order to inform her of her husband's death. The book allegedly deals with serious life matters, tries to address real traumas and to lace glints of political and social protest into the narrative. However, practically every part of it is laden with apparent ambition to charm, flatter and stimulate the reader with piquant and erotic materials seasoned with light-weighted philosophy.

The main problem with Ben Amotz's book isn't with these qualities but with the liberties he took in drawing most detailed descriptions of intense and ghastly sights and events from the battlefield without actually experiencing any of them, or indeed anything like them. As he himself commented, being already fifty years old in 1973, he was not drafted and spent the war at home, watching television. One might argue that there is nothing wrong with that —surely a long line of literary masterpieces depicted difficult and dramatic experiences that weren't necessarily based on personal recollections, including war and battle descriptions. Still, after the unprecedented earthquake of the First World War, there formed a silent understanding in 20th century literature that the moral license to write in first person about experiences of fighting in the front is only granted to those who actually witnessed the horrors themselves, and only in the poetics suited to the intensity of represented events. The literature generated by this war and any wars to follow has been written almost exclusively by civilians turned combat soldiers and then eventually turned authors. Dan Miron put it clearly in his book "Facing the Silent Brother" (1992):

> The root of this upheaval is in the feeling that the modern battlefield created a unique existential reality; a reality containing aspects separating it from any previously known context from one's life before it, or after it. Hence the feeling, that has become an implied norm, that it is only fitting that the expression of experiences from the front be separated from narrative and descriptive conventions and should be written almost entirely in the form of confession of the horrors seen with one's own eyes; that the war literature should be a direct and completely credible exposure of a shocked psyche – an exposure that organizes a crumbled experience in an up close and personal narration (diary, memoirs, confession, stream of consciousness) and puts into question the mere gesture of literary description, especially in its traditional mimetic realization.

Dan Ben Amotz's book is the exception that proves the rule. An examination of the reaction that Israeli prose had to The Yom Kippur War shows it had accepted this silent understanding, and therefore it seems to go down two separate paths that only rarely coincide. Fictional canonical prose, written by professional prose writers that naturally didn't usually serve in combat units, resolved to show restraint and self-control and refrained almost completely from placing its characters in the actual heart of battle. Scenes of combat and fire are given only very carefully, scantily and sparingly. Instead, it dealt with various "peripheral" issues: episodes from the margins of the battlefield, descriptions of civilian lives in the home front during the fighting, the persisting reality of bereavement and disability or characters of combat soldiers

that can't lay their pain to rest when the battles cease. The dejection and the devastation that spread in Israel after October 1973 are depicted in these works in both direct and indirect ways – so much so that it wouldn't be exaggerated to say that almost every significant work of prose published in the second half of the 1970s carries the mark of war to some extent, even if it doesn't address it explicitly. Prominent motifs in this literature are soul searching, attempts to decipher the feeling of devastation and scruples about the Jewish and Israeli identity that had risen in its wake; however, the presence of the battlefield itself is indirect, implied and partial. In the second path are prose books written by "non-authors". These are combat soldiers who experienced the war in its fullest intensity and felt sooner or later – sometimes even decades later – the need to express the stories in writing. Even though they adopted various narrative techniques in order to keep the story flowing, they normally didn't have any artistic pretense and only drove to deliver their experiences effectively and directly. This documentary prose shocks the reader merely by the force of the crude facts it contains. Sometimes the stories are told in a documentary-autobiographical-confessional way, and sometimes in the forms of event-packed novels that mask the authentic people and events with a light veil of fiction, and other times, in any mixture of reality and fiction.

These two paths had started forming shortly after the war, and their presence was visible during the rest of the decade. They did not disappear completely after that, and some of their ripest examples came during the 1980s and 1990s and even during the first decade of the 21st century. The unaided experience of the battle and proper artistic expression befitting the intensity of events only rarely coincided, and these rare occurrences shall also be discussed later.

2. The Canonical Fiction: Around the Point

In 1975, Yitshak Ben-Ner published two stories that bore the mark of The Yom Kippur War. The unusual form of publication, in a daily newspaper (not even in its literary supplement), accentuated their loaded and current nature, which didn't subtract from their capability as fine works of art, and directed a lot of attention to them. A Year later they were collected in a book ("Rural Sunset", 1976) that had quite a resonance in unto itself.

The story "Eighteen Months" ("Shmona Assar Hodashim") appeared exactly eighteen months after the war started. True to its name, it is a story of those eighteen months from a perspective of a father, searching in vain for his son, who died in battle and was not found. In his hallucinations, he goes back and reconstructs an image of his son's final moments as told by his friends: how he jumped, covered in flames, from the hit tank, rolled in the sand, stood up and was gradually consumed by smoke and was never seen again. The story interlaces the father's stubborn attempts to gather accounts of his son's combat path in order to solve the mystery of his disappearance, and a description of the crumbling fabric of his family life. We are shown very vivid images of him growing apart from his wife, his addiction to desperate casual flings with young women who cross his path, and his growing estrangement from his living son, the twin of the one who fell. In the background, the dense atmosphere of Israel after the war is discernible: "The war has already ended and still the country blazes with wrath and fury. Protest demonstrations in Jerusalem. The revelations in the newspapers. Other people's faces appearing on the television screen. New names:

Motti Ashkenazi. Asa Kadmoni. The Agranat commission. Others." Only at the end of the story is the acceptance of the son's loss implied, which brings a calm and an appeasement between the narrator and himself and between him and his surroundings. The story is completely immersed in the war's reverberations and consequences, and yet it is anchored in the life in the Israeli home front, and its core is following the destruction grief causes the hero and his family.

So it is with the story "Nicole", given from a young woman's point of view – the lover of a revered brigade commander that had made fatal errors of judgement during the war. The story takes place two years after the war, in Tel Aviv, when that haunted officer, called Berko, immerses himself in endless investigations of the battles' every move to try and clear his name of the cloud of inexplicit blame shrouding him. From this, Nicole goes back and reconstructs the chain of events leading from the confident complacency of commanders and their retinue across the Sinai Peninsula to the hard fall of that Yom Kippur. The weight of the blame is mainly caused by two of the fallen, that Berko's failures allegedly led to their deaths: a signal operator in one of the strongholds called in vain for help, and a young armored corps officer with whom Nicole had been in love. However, the story's center of gravity is Nicole's character itself, a complex and elusive figure who embodies in the beginning the hedonistic promiscuous atmosphere that preceded the war. Later, by her very presence at Berko's side and with the web of light torture she spins around him, she becomes a part of the punishing mechanism agonizing him at all times. Critics noticed the story's symbolic dimension, in its condensed representation of the Israeli hubris and its punishment in the two main characters, personifying the failed military and the sinful Israeli society. However, prior to any allegoric interpretation, Ben-Ner's two stories, written as they happened, excel in their rich psychological texture, authentically demonstrating the distress that came upon Israeli society in the two years after the war.

1977 saw the publication of two prominent novels that The Yom Kippur War was at their center, even though following the aforementioned silent understanding they were not focused on the fronts but on the city of Haifa, home to both authors. "The Lover" ("HaMe'ahev"), A. B. Yehoshua's first novel, raised a lot of attention. The book is written as a mosaic of six narrators, weaving together a grotesque and paradoxical portrait of a family living in Haifa: Adam, the owner of an auto repair shop, his wife Asya, a teacher, and their teenage daughter Daffy. Two lovers permeate into this family with Adam's initiative or covert encouragement, one for the daughter and one for the mother. The first one, Gavriel Arditi, is an ex-Israeli coming back from France to receive his inheritance from his grandmother Veducha (whose voice is also heard in the novel). The second is an Arab teen called Na'im, a worker in the auto repair shop, whom Adam recruits to the long nightly searches, combing Israel's roads for Gavriel's ancient Morris automobile after he vanishes during the pandemonium of The Yom Kippur War. At the same time, Adam keeps visiting the offices of the military unit responsible for locating missing persons, conducting his fruitless investigations. Only after many months, the mystery of Gavriel's disappearance is resolved, when it is discovered that he abandoned the war front in Sinai, ran away to Jerusalem and there merged himself into a Hassidic community is one of the religious quarters. Gavriel gives Adam a detailed history of the events to follow his arrival at the military camp for registration, in order to avoid being marked a deserter. Instead of being sent off home, he found himself ensnared by an intimidating major that

arranged his fast enlistment and drove him to the Refidim base himself, out of a secret ambition – so senses Gavriel – to ensure his death in battle as revenge for his long years of absence from Israel. The days in Sinai, being affiliated to a unit full of young combat soldiers, appeared to him like a confusion of meaningless shifts and halts between shell whistles and explosions, until he resolved to escape and made it out of Sinai disguised as a Hassidic Jew.

The battlefront flickers into this novel only marginally, from the back, from ground level and from the blurred view point of a passive pseudo-soldier, disconnected from his surroundings and not comprehending what is happening around him: "they'd lie down, scrape the ground a little and again get onto the vehicles and go. From time to time they'd open fire from all vehicles on yellow targets that would be themselves rustling in a sleepy sort of way on the dusty horizon. I never fired [...] I turned myself into some sort of object, devoid of will, a dead thing that only occasionally glances the near view, the endless and unchanging desert." In an interview marking the release of the book, Yehoshua described the caution with which he set out to write about the war and the restriction he put upon himself: "True, writing about the war is a big obstacle. In my novel I deal only with a certain aspect of the war – the problem of missing people. This is a subject that hurt me deeply and also tempted me with the literary potential it held." However, the war's role in "The Lover" is wider and more complicated than stated by Yehoshua, and it lies mainly in the hidden symbolic layers with which the novel is laden. Yehushua's grotesque family plot could be read as an allegoric layout, testing the prolonged social processes that had led to the devastation of 1973, and in this interpretation, several objects in the story serve a twofold role, both as part of actual reality and as a symbol calling for interpretation. As such is the light blue restored '47 Morris car, painted black and turned transport vehicle for Hassidic Jews going from Jerusalem to Benei-Brak and back; and the Haifa-based auto repair shop that grew immensely after 1967 with the reliance on Arab workers. "So what has happened to the '47-'48 models of our lives?" asked Gershon Shaked. "Have such models come into the possession of deserters and Israeli emigrants, and has the attempt to restore them between the last two wars been a failure?" To his interpretation, "The Lover" raises fundamental questions concerning the nature and the future of the Israeli existence under the Zionist enterprise and the kernel of destruction looming from within – issues that intensified in light of the old anxieties resurfacing after The Yom Kippur War.

In May 1977, three months after the release of "The Lover", Sammi Michael published his book “Refuge" ("Hassut"). The novel is anchored in the lives of leading figures in The Israeli Communist Party in Haifa and apparently based on actual persons and events. It is set in the first days of The Yom Kippur War and centers around two married couples: Shula and Mordukh, who are both Jewish, and Fouad, who is an Arab, and his Jewish wife Shoshana. Within the strict hierarchical setting of the party, they and their comrades weave a friendly and affectionate relationship, allegedly unaffected by the national divide. However, when the war breaks, it puts this relationship to the test and calls into question the continuation of the harmony between the two peoples in the party. The conflict centers on Shula's character: her husband Mordukh is drafted and she knows he went to war out of identification with the county that gave him a place to call home after years of political imprisonment in his homeland, Iraq. She is deeply worried for his life and equally so for the life of

Rami, the childhood sweetheart she has never forgiven herself for letting go, who serves as an Armored Corps battalion commander in The Golan Heights. Her heart breaks at Rami's death, in one of the war's first days. At the same time, the party leadership orders her to give shelter to the poet Fat'hi, one of the organization's most prominent intellectuals, who is expected to be wanted for administrative detention. In those days, Fat'hi is overflowing with feelings of Arab nationalism, wishing for Israel's downfall, and when he reckons Israel's enemies have gotten the upper hand, he very graciously offers Shula and her son refuge in his friends' house in Jenin. For her part, Shula identifies with her husband, fighting in the IDF, and out of this loyalty, she throws Fat'hi out of her house. The novel's conceptual solution is clear: at the ultimate hour of crisis, the tribal-national loyalty overcomes political and ideological partnerships. Critics discounted the novel's artistic quality, but noted the innovation of dealing with a unique sector of Israeli life that has yet to be displayed in literature.

The affinity between A. B. Yehoshua's and Sammi Michael's books isn't explained only by the common Haifa background, together with the Jewish-Arab context, but by both stories' unconventional contemplation of The Yom Kippur War. In Yehoshua's book, of all people it is Na'im, the Arab boy, who first mentions the war; he describes watching the reactions of Jewish people: "Again they get killed and we are the ones who need to shrink, lower our voices and be careful not to burst out laughing with no apparent reason, hearing a joke that has nothing to do with them." So it is in Sammi Michael's novel: the outbreak of war is viewed from the Arab town of Jenin, of all places, where the poet Fat'hi and his nephew go visit friends and relatives, including activists in the Palestinian terror organizations. The two anxiously turn the radio on in order to listen to the news after hearing the growl of a convoy of army vehicles passing through in the outskirts of town, the roar of jets cutting the sky and seeing a burning airplane flying by. The choice of pinning the moment of the outbreak of war to the Arabs' point of view is part of a comprehensive layout of reversal and defamiliarization devices used by the two authors in dealing with the war. A. B Yehoshua presents it from the viewpoint of an emigrant, a deserter, an eccentric visitor who during the war retreats into the depth of the Hassidic, Post-Zionist and Anti-Zionist world. Sammi Michael views the war from within the world of a minor opposition group which is also outside the Zionist consensus. Accordingly, they are able to raise openly with a special severity quandaries and objections roused by the war regarding the validity and conventions of said consensus, and to challenge it both intrinsically and extrinsically.

Two other novels, published towards the end of that decade, added their own take of the keen questions raised by The Yom Kippur War, keeping the accepted literary code preventing authors from depicting the fire itself. October 1979 saw the publication of "Feathers" ("Notsot"), Haim Be'er's first novel, who until then was known as a poet. The publication of "Feathers" was a rare literary event, both because of its sweeping reception by the readers and for the critics' keen interest, shown in articles of appreciation, dispute, and commentary. The first and last chapters of the novel take place by the banks of the Great Bitter Lake in Egypt in the winter after The Yom Kippur War, where the narrator serves in the burial unit of the Military Rabbinate. The heavy atmosphere of death resting upon the framework chapters sip through to the inner story, tracing the narrator's childhood in the divided Jerusalem of the '50s. The main axis of the childhood plot is the story of the hero's friendship with

Mordechai Leder, an eccentric utopian working as a collector of funds for the school for the blind. That inner plot surprisingly connects to the framework chapters when it turns out in the final lines of the novel, that one of the dead Israeli soldiers pulled out of the Bitter Lake's waters is none other than Leder's son.

The war is represented in “Feathers” by the unique and seemingly marginal viewpoint of a person forced to deal with its bitter consequences in his job of locating, gathering and burying body parts of both Israeli and Egypt fallen soldiers. Its literary function is seemingly minor as well, being a structural frame or a starting point for diving into the narrator's childhood memories. However, death's centrality and tangibility throughout the novel might indicate that the novel as a whole is a severe literary response to the shock of the war. And indeed, as Haim Be'er later testified, his experiences of its horrors as a soldier in the Military Rabbinate burial unit had set the course of his writing career even if they were not explicitly expressed in his writing: "The Yom Kippur War was the single most important public and private event of my life. I think that my identity as a prose writer had sprouted from this war, and that to this day it continues to be the fountainhead of everything I have ever done." Based on that life-changing experience, and from the perspective of thirty years, Be'er raises tough objections to the literature written as a response to The Yom Kippur War. In his opinion, this is a literature that hasn't expressed the full intensity of rage, hasn't known which questions to ask both on the human and metaphysical levels, and hence it is a failed and unfulfilled literature, excluding a few examples from the field of poetry.

A seemingly restrained expression of the unhealing devastation appeared a few months after "Feathers" in the novel "A Journey in the Month of Av" ("Massa BeAv"), by Aharon Megged. Daniel Levin, an Israeli Physicist staying in the US for his sabbatical, and his wife Anat are called back to Israel when their son Giddy goes missing and does not show up for his scheduled day of conscription. Their eldest son, Amnon, had fallen six years previously when serving in the southern front in The Yom Kippur War as an Armored Corps soldier. The narrative spans the course of two days and follows the father's journey southward, to the city of Eilat, which is the last place his son has been seen, and from there to the vast planes of the Sinai Peninsula. It is a journey of conclusion and soul searching, during which Daniel deliberates with himself about his whole life course eventually admitting his own personality faults – the alienating and indrawn tendencies that caused him to miss the relationship he could have had with his younger son and to deeply rift his marriage. The emotional thawing that befalls his frosty personality during the journey causes the pain and the guilt of his eldest son's death to flood him in an intensity he has never known before; and so, the search for the living son surprisingly becomes a journey towards the dead son and a conscious confrontation with the pain of both personal and national devastation generated by The Yom Kippur War. Instead of continuing further south from Eilat, to Nuweiba and Sharm el-Sheikh, where Giddy might actually be, Daniel turns his car west and makes his way to the vale in the heart of the Peninsula, where the chassis of burned tanks still remain – out of one of which Amnon had leaped out to his death. The desert vale that appears to the hero at different points of his journey is one of the fundamental symbols of the story. It is connected clearly to the "Valley of Vision" of Ezekiel's dry bones prophesy, to the poem "Mettei Midbar" (“Dead of the Desert”) By Bialik, to the story of Korah and his followers being swallowed by the earth, and to the horrible sight of a nuclear holocaust.

The end of the journey is engulfed with fright and deathly shadows: as Daniel Levin is weakening, and is probably dying of a heart attack in the shade of the burned tank in the vale, his imagination assails him with visions if total destruction: "and again, there shall stand mighty armies on the two ridges from both sides, mightier than ever before; and again the valley shall drown with thunder from thousands of cannons and its skies shall be bombarded by tens of thousands of flying bolts of fire; and again there shall be heard a solitary scream in the midst of it all, a lost, lonely scream –". These anxious visions of ruin and complete catastrophe inspired by his son's death during the war are not unique to him. His old father reflects doubt whether the Jewish people can sustain its national independence for long, and his wife, Anat, imagines the collapse of the Zionist fort just like the crusaders' forts had collapsed before it: "She shuts her eyes and sees lines of tanks entering the city, plowing the streets. A thousand Arab soldiers, drunk with the rage of vengeance, storm the houses like locusts. Slaughter. Nowhere to hide. Breaking into the shelter in the basement." "A Journey in the Month of Av" is a somber and pessimistic book – a shock response of sorts to the devastation of The Yom Kippur war. Peace is not what is to come, even though the story takes place in the days of sealing the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt (and some of the characters Daniel encounters on his journey do talk of deep doubts as to the chances for this possible peace and its very actuality), but a loop of repeating catastrophes until the end of time.

In the beginning of the 1980s, a new group of prose writers joined the circle of authors writing about The Yom Kippur War. These were young people, born in the first half of the 1950s, who participated in the war as regular soldiers and became writers shortly after it. Having experienced the war actively, they supposedly had the moral legitimacy to depict its most sensitive themes. But it turns out that, probably because they had entered the literary territory and not the documentary one, they too accepted the limitations of the aforementioned implicit agreement. In other words: the war's depiction had been done very carefully, indirectly, without nearing the actual fighting. Two of these shall be discussed here.

In 1982, the novel "Happy Soldiers" ("Hayalim Smehim") by Mishka Ben David was published. Its literary form is deliberately complex. It entwines chapters of direct description, conscious exercises in novel writing, segments from confessions and notes written at the request of the military psychiatrist, and diary entries that formed during the narrator's ship voyage to Europe after being released from regular service. However, hidden underneath the veil of sophisticated structures is a very clear and simple story that captured the hearts of the readers and the critics. Its center is the lives of both male and female soldiers serving in the Communications Corps repeater station on a tall mountain in western Sinai a few months after The Yom Kippur War. The narrator, Micha, who is in a way a representation of the author, is busy, like his friends, with two main things: a variety of sexual experiences with the female soldiers in the base (alongside long indecisive thoughts of his future with his beloved Dahlia), and somber existential meditation of the meaning of life considering death, eternity and infinity. The core of the story is a comical paradox a la "Catch 22" by Joseph Heller: Micha is sent to the military Psychiatrist because he hadn't been seen to exhibit any signs of trauma following his difficult experiences during the war, as a junior commander in the Golani Brigade. On the contrary – he shows a strong desire to continue serving as a combat soldier and is therefore transferred to that rear

communications base in Sinai, because obviously "only people who are fit but unwilling are sent to by combat soldiers, because it's natural to not want to be a combat soldier – it's proof they're normal." Micha's memories of the war are packed into one brief chapter and it is apparent he delivers them unwillingly, as a hated chore. The chain of events starts with him being summoned unexpectedly from his house on the morning of Yom Kippur, and the description of the preparations before being swept into the turbulence of war is especially long and elaborated. In contrast, the depiction of the battles themselves is only a few sentences long, consisting of fragments of memories – vague images of charging and explosions – and ending with the fact that Micha had received a citation for his actions, even though he states "actually, I was in shock from the first shot to the last." This chapter is noticeably dry and laconic compared to the calm descriptive and mental flowing of the rest of the story. It is clear that the narrator is deterred from concretely addressing that week of intensive fighting in the Golan Heights, and is noticeably relieved to have finished describing it and going on with the portrayal of the current peaceful reality. After having gotten rid of his unpleasant duty of relaying all of his knowledge of the events of the war, he describes the lessons he has personally learnt from it, such as how dear his family is to him and how much he would want to start his own family, with his girlfriend Dahlia.

Another example from the same time is "Mikha'el Tsidon, Michael", one of David Grossman's first stories (1980). The hero is an ex-English Journalist, born in 1923, and had decided in 1950 to tie himself to the state of Israel, married a young holocaust survivor, and fathered a son and a daughter. In his journalistic work, as a columnist in a well-read newspaper, he is known for his extremely harsh but completely uninfluential criticism, until he becomes something of an amusing curiosity in the Israeli reality of blind complacency between 1967 and 1973. The lecture he had given six months before the outbreak of The Yom Kippur War, in the his son's base, he writes, only gave rise to either laughter or apathy: "I talked about my worries of a military revolution in Israel, of a new war breaking soon in the middle east – one we shall lose, seeing as we didn't use the knowledge and power gained from the last war – I described horrific scenarios, laughable ones." In the meantime, his marriage crumbles and falls apart, but his source of pride is his son, Yonatan, the combat pilot. In the time of narration, 1980, Mikha'el Tsidon is living alone in Haifa, after the divorce, with his dog that's dying of cancer, waiting longingly for visits from his son, the experienced pilot. The reader gradually realizes the strangeness of these meetings, until the truth is finally revealed, at the very end of the story. It turns out that these meetings, as well as all the lively conversations are only part of hallucinations within the hero's increasingly insane mind, for Yonatan had been killed in The Yom Kippur War, seven years previously, when he inexplicably went off course and fell with his craft into the red sea. The devastation of war is personified by Mikha'el Tsidon, both publicly, with his persona of a furious prophet, whose warnings had been ignored, and especially personally, with the personal cost of his life being ruined and his mind lost. Years later, David Grossman returned in full power to the scenery of The Yom Kippur War, and that shall be discussed later.

3. First-Person Accounts: From Heroic to Traumatic Narrative

The restraint that belletristic writers forced upon themselves and their careful avoidance of visually confronting the center of battle are intensified compared to the direct nature of the documentary prose that had started coming out after The Yom Kippur War, and keeps being created to this day. Its authors are not professional writers and most of them didn't write out of any artistic pretense. Each of them had taken part in the war, had been scarred by the tough experiences, had seen death and had been close to it himself, and sooner or later felt the need to write the sole book of his life that would give him outlet – bring his account to the public's knowledge and make sure that its memory will not be lost. The motivation is unmistakably documentary and confessional and the materials are all actual even if they were sometimes covered by a thin layer of fiction. However, each of these writers had designed his story with some consciousness, with characteristics loaned from the artistic prose. This is apparent in certain qualities of the texts: in the construction of the narrative situation, in back and forth movement along the timeline, in calculated effects of opening and closure, in characterization and in exposing inner life, in the coordination of polyphony, in techniques of confession, in the incorporation of segments of thought and glimpses of memories, in the careful release of information, and other narrative devices. At their best, they add a distinct literary quality to some of these texts and allow them to be perceived as documentary novels. On the other hand, they can be discussed as witness accounts, some of which are reports of trauma, using tools from the academic discourse on the topic of testimony that had branched out and had been refined during the last generation, and by no means separates between fiction and the documentary literature. Dozens of such non-fiction books came out between 1975 and 2010, and looking through them along the time line, as will be demonstrated below, two main phenomena deserve attention. The first is the increasing flow of stories as time moved on and The Yom Kippur War was receding into history. After a light "drizzle" of books in the '70s, '80s and the '90s, since the year 2000 and especially since the thirtieth anniversary of the war (2003) and during the last decade, the trickle is becoming quite a flow, and who knows what shall come after that. The second phenomenon is the gradual shift in the center of gravity of experience and narrative from the heroic to the traumatic. Namely: with the passing of the years, there has been a decrease in the non-critical identification with the assembly of values and circumstances under which the authors were sent to war. At the same time, an opposite major narrative took over, namely: first-person accounts revealing physical and mental scars and their long-term ramifications, along with expression of rage against the political leadership and the chain of military command, whose failures caused the devastation that won't heal.

An early example of the heroic narrative is Avigdor Kahalani's book, "Oz 77" (1975), documenting his fighting as head of a tank battalion in The 7th Armored Brigade in the northern part of The Golan Heights. The book focuses on the author's private experiences and his viewpoint doesn't exceed the battalion he commanded. It is structured in a solid frame of well-designed beginning and ending. The symbolic opening scene shows the author laying down new slates on the roof of his house, ten days before the war. From there he is urgently called back to his battalion by his brigade commander, when the alert state is raised. The ending scene takes place about four weeks later, in the last 24 hours of war. It too revolves around a talk with the

brigade commander, informing Kahalani of the deaths of his younger brother, and his wife's brother, and sends him home to support his family. Between the departure and the return home, stretches the story of Kahalani and his battalion's fighting the war, as a chain of dramatic events, interlacing short descriptions and an abundance of dialogues between the author and his subordinates and commanders, face to face and on radio.

The most dramatic moment in the book is in the description of the battle fought by the battalion on the morning of the 9th of October in the area known as "The Valley of Tears", when Kahalani realized that his men are hesitant in proceeding onto the front line in fear of being hit by the Syrian tanks. "They were scared, we all were, but there was no other way," he says. The determined leadership that he displayed during those moments, the example he set and the urging words he said on the radio, were the reason they won the battle, and probably set the course of the entire battle in that region, and it is for them that Kahalani received the highest Medal of Valor. This is the climactic scene of "Oz 77", and it fits the essence of the book, that is a song of praise to the brave Armored Corps soldiers, including the author himself. Human weaknesses embarrass him. When after days of intense fighting he meets his brother Arnon, serving as a mechanic in his battalion, he is completely embarrassed of the tear of excited emotion that appears in the corner of his eye and hopes his soldiers won't notice it, for it may shatter his tough persona. He is more comfortable quoting the brigade commander's words to him on the radio, to the ears of the entire battalion, at the end of that crucial Battle: "I shall do whatever I can in order for you to win, you are an Israeli hero!" in the short introduction to his book, Kahalani openly admits and confirms that his book was written out of the wish to heighten the heroic ethos of the Armored fighting, and therefore he does not intend to deal with the problematic aspects of the war, its circumstances and its management: "not everything was a 'failure'. My story is anchored on a brigade that knew what it was facing, was trained, packed and ready, and was led by a commander felt a war was coming beforehand and did the effort to prepare his men for it. This book belongs, therefore, to the soldiers that were alert and prepared."

A late continuation to that same combat soldiers' heroic-documentary prose could be found in Haim Sabbato's celebrated book "Adjustment of Sights" ("Te'um Kavanot") (1999), written twenty five years after The Yom Kippur War. My choice to include this book in the discussion of the documentary channel isn't self-explanatory, seeing as the book was written by a well-known author and it bears the features of artistic prose, excelling in its complex aesthetic fabric and a distinct lingual uniqueness. However, the fact of the matter is that this is an authentic book of testimony of a combat soldier, with no fictional additions, and hence it befits the label of a documentary novel. It is a tank gunner's report of the battles in which he has taken part, and it shows the known marks of a combat soldier's account: a limited view point, bafflement and lack of knowledge, detailed descriptions of the life of the soldiers, switching from moments of combat and danger to interval of rest and recuperation, mixture of the trivial and the horrific, the difficulty and the doubt in deciding upon the way the story should be told.

Sabbato's amorphous experiences are cast in several simultaneous molds. The most prominent is the plot of searching for his childhood friend Dov Indig, that was drafted alongside him in the end of Yom Kippur, but had been separated from him in

the tumult of war. The author vainly tries to follow his friend's trace, until shreds of information from different sources consolidate in his consciousness into the certainty of Dov's death. A symmetrical connection is drawn between the opening and the ending. The story opens with the ritual of Kiddush Levana in which they both take part in the Amshinov Hassidic Dynasty's synagogue in Jerusalem in that Satursay night and ends after a few months in a similar ritual in The Golan Heights, drenched in the absence of Dov. It's clear that the order of narration has been intricately planned to move from the margins to the essence, and not strictly chronologically. The story reaches its climax only in its second half, when the narrator is called to testify in front of investigating officers from the IDF's History Branch a few weeks after the end of the war. Of all situations, it is then that he gathers strength to reveal what has happened to him, and tells of his darkest hours during the war, when his tank got hit and he and his friends were miraculously saved from being captured by Syrian commando forces and set out on a long survival journey until they were rescued from the battlefield.

However, the uniqueness of "Adjustment of Sights" isn't in the events themselves but in the book lingual fabric and moreover, in the intellectual and spiritual stand that gave birth to it. Sabbato and his friends, Yeshiva students, experienced the war and interpreted it, as they did their entire lives, as a religious experience. The story is laden with scenes of both private and public prayers, chapters of Halakha and Mitzvahs, sermons, hymns and Psalms, and its heros' lips speak verses all the time. It is filled with confidence of divine providence and the belief in its rightness, as spoken by Elhanan, a friend of the narrator: "I talked about what we learned in the Yeshiva, about confidence in the Lord and the providence upon the people of Israel [...] I said time and time again: there is no certainty what is to happen to us, but the people of Israel shall prevail". This essential quality of the book has made it popular among the religious public but has infuriated those wishing to keep The Yom Kippur War in the plane of human existence. Ruvik Rosenthal, who had lost his younger brother in the war, criticized the view of total belief emanating from the book and questioned the possibility of there being a war experience void of the fear of death: "do the verses and the love of god really protect the soldier and give him an actual advantage over his non-religious counterpart? I find it very hard to believe." Haim Be'er too wrote severe words against the religious belief devoid of doubt apparent in Sabbato's book: "And I ask myself, how can a young man, a tank commander, go back to his world after his best friend had been killed and write as he has [...] is that how you come back? And what about the questions arising, shattering the soul?"

The restlessness reflected in these words is obviously connected to the timing in which the book was written and published. The heroic perspective characterizing the early documentary prose had dissipated over the years, so that when it came out, Sabbato's "positive" book seemed to stand out compared to the new critical perspective that had taken over the combat soldiers' accounts. If one wishes to mark the distinct moment of shift from the heroic narrative to the traumatic one, it may be found in the book "Fire" ("Esh") by Yuval Neria, recipient of The Medal of Valor, preceding Sabbato's book by ten years. It is difficult to pinpoint the book's genre. It is seemingly a fictional novel, but the hero, Ya'ir is the similitude of the author, and what happens to him during the twelve days of combat matches what is known about

Yuval Neria's part in The Yom Kippur War. The author himself states in the opening of the book : "Many of the events depicted in this book took place in real life. All the characters are combinations of various sources".

The book is divided into two different halves. First it details the days of arrogant complacency in 1973, when only Amir, a friend of the hero, heretically makes warnings that war is coming but is dismissed as an eccentric nuisance. Three intense chapters are devoted to describing Amir and Ya'ir's combat, until each of them are badly injured in his own sector. These are unmistakable tales of bravery, depicting the Armored Corps' combat in The Sinai Peninsula as a web of daring actions and self-sacrifice. Ya'ir's war path is a fast hectic chain of episodes. He moves from hit tank to hit tank, striving tirelessly towards the front line, sees his friends getting killed in front of him, and when the book reaches its climax, he crosses a bastioned Egyptian site close to "The Chinese Farm", at night, alone, and by foot, in order to join his unit, fighting on the other side. Momentarily, he views himself from the outside and is astounded by the violent trance getting hold of him: "I love you, whispers Ya'ir to the machine-gun he is holding. I love you, and he isn't even alarmed by his behavior. He no longer fears anything. He's prepared, if needed, to run over the closest vehicle with his tank, to ram and to tramp it." The turmoil of war is cut short at once when he is badly injured. "And all of a sudden, Tel Aviv", the story concludes the swift confounding move from the scene of battle to the hospital, and from that point onwards, there opens an entirely different story.

The second portion of the story and shrouded in darkness and fury. Amir, who is badly burnt and bandaged from head to foot like a mummy, is shut within his tortured consciousness until he leaps out of his hospital bed and jumps out of the window to his death. Ya'ir sinks into a prolonged depression and after months of being confined to his bed, his life spins in a circle of gloom and bewilderment. Even though the tales of his bravery travel far, he is overcome with anger for the leadership's failure causing thousands of needless deaths. Even after years, he can't stop himself from asking the question "What exactly happened there in Yom Kippur?" The outbreak of The Lebanon War in 1982 reopens his wounds when he realizes that no lesson was learnt, and that again, hundreds of lives were lost for naught. These chapters contain the kernels of the main topics to feed the combat soldier's prose from the beginning of the 1990s and onward: representations of physical and emotional trauma, anger directed at the political and military leadership, and the inability to let go of the burden of the war's experiences throughout the long years.

A special channel in the combat soldiers' prose, leaving its mark mostly during the last twenty years, could be called "the literature of the mentally injured". Some of these stories were produced spontaneously, but sometimes the act of bringing up the memories and putting them in writing was a means of the mental healing process, and was encouraged and guided by the therapists. A distinct bare example is Menahem Ansbacher's book "A Shard of The Silver Platter" ("Resis Mimagash HaKesef"). The author, commander of Tel El-Saki in The Golan Heights, stood in the center of one of the hardest events of The Yom Kippur War, when he and his soldiers were caught in a frontal vantage post. Together they fought the Syrian forces besieging the mound, and he had witnessed the deaths of dozens of soldiers from the forces sent to rescue him and his men and was finally extracted, wounded, after two bloody days. The book's

uniqueness lies in the way it was outlined and written. Twenty five years after the war, the author realized that even though his injured body had healed, his soul still needs to be treated. His appeal to the rehabilitation branch of the ministry of defense to recognize his mental disability led to forty nine weekly therapy sessions with one of the branch workers, which are the framework of the narrative. She mainly serves as an opened ear for him, but as his confidence in her grows he starts being able to open up and release his story bit by bit, and even to put it to paper. The story is conducted in two interlacing sequences: the affair of the battle of Tel El-Saki and the documentation of the writing of the book side by side with the process the author is going through, dealing with increasing depth with the horrible experiences that had been gnawing at him for a quarter of a century.

Did the act of writing the book ease the pain of its writer? Yes and no. when meeting with his brothers in arms and their families, on the thirtieth anniversary of the war, he still feels filled to the brim to the point of overflowing and knows that the burden shall never be lightened, but at least he can finally tell his story and draw strength from the shared destiny and warm friendship with those that were there with him: "I realized that our souls are still there. Inside us, the war still burns and scotches. Deep within, we keep fighting the holding defense battles [...] I realized that if we are destined to stay there all our lives anyway, at least we should be there together."

The first decade of the 21st century brought more unique additions to the soldiers' literature of trauma and protest. It seems that the twenty fifth anniversary of the war marked a cross-road and a turning point to many, and the thirtieth even more so. Since then, there has been an increasing abundance of personal stories, as well as documentary literature and research analyses.

Quite a surprising example is one of the most prominent heroic tales arising from the war, the story of "Zvika's force" operating in The Golan Heights during the first two days of combat. The tale is well-known: Armored Corps officer, Zvika Greengold, of the 188th brigade, commanded a lone tank, fighting on his own at night for many hours against large Syrian forces. Masquerading as an entire armored unit, he managed to obstruct them with steadfast movements. The next day, badly injured, he fled them almost single-handedly from the division base's fences moments before they would conquer it. For these actions he received the highest Medal of Valor.

recorded in annals of military prowess

Only after thirty five years did Zvika Greengold oblige to tell his full story. Directly and precisely, he delivers the events of that intensive day, and details how he destroyed Syrian vehicles, switching tanks every time one was hit, and how he was shaken time and time again, seeing the blood drenched battlefield packed with bodies as far as the eye could see. The reader learns quite a lot about the Armored Corps' combat drills, imprinted on the author and aiding him to composedly move through the path of combat. Furthermore, Greengold anchors his war story to his upbringing and to the values rooted in him as a native of Kibbutz Lohamei HaGetaot (literally, the ones who fought in the ghettos), founded in light of the heroic stories of Yitshak Zuckerman and his comrades in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. His mother and father were holocaust survivors and had been among the founders of the Kibbutz. That is why he laces his parents' life stories into the narrative and stresses that their example was an inspiration to him during the battles' darkest hours. Things reach their emotional and symbolic climax in the chapter titled "The Yellow Strip of Cloth of

The Medal of Valor", detailing the author's visit to the site of the Warsaw Ghetto, after many years. There, at the request of his fellow travelers, he tells his war story, standing at the site of the bunker of Mordechai Anielewicz and his friends in 18 Miła street. He says he is sorry that he hadn't brought his Medal of Valor, the opposite of the yellow badge, in order to wear it there for the first time, and to show it to the ghosts of the dead. That scene is concluded by an emotional group singing of the Partisan Song.

It is hard to imagine a more uplifting frame for the story of the combat of The Yom Kippur War, as a link in the chain of Jewish bravery over the generations. However, the heroic tale and its historical resonance are but one side of Zvika Greengold's book. The reader shall be surprised to discover that the author wished not only to expose his personal tale of the battles but also, and maybe even more so, to show the disastrous mental trauma he experienced. He does not hide the physiological symptoms of the anxiety he was feeling during the battles, the horrifying effects of the sights of the blood drenched battlefields, and the manifestations of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder that he has been experiencing for many years to come. The decorated hero clearly recognizes himself as an untreated mentally-wounded and depicts the months after the war as an ongoing bleak nightmare of distress, erupting from time to time as unusual behaviors. The place of the political protest hasn't been neglected as well. Seeing how close Israel had been to defeat during the first days of the war, he says "I lost confidence in my country's leadership, in my military's leadership [...] I felt I had no one else to trust [...] and the pains of disillusionment – incurable, endless pains – were just unbareable".

Zvika Greengold's book exhibits a complete manifestion of the central qualities characterizing the later documentary account-literature: the description of soldiers and junior officers valiantly fighting, laying down their lives; an anger for the failures of the senior command and the political leadership; traces of prolonged mental injury; the gnawing feelings of guilt and the attempts to overcome the mental devastation by directly confronting it, the writing of the book being one of the channels of the healing process. A perspective of thirty or more years was apparently needed for the then twenty-year-old soldiers to intertwine the heroic and the traumatic narratives into one complex construction.

4. Integration: Canonical Fiction Touches the Fire

That same perspective of decades later bore its mark on the literary prose as well. While the account literature was in the midst of a noticeable reawakening, so did the artistic prose turn to look again on The Yom Kippur War in ways it had not yet tread.

It took the canonic narrative prose more than twenty five years to produce the two single most important pieces dealing with The Yom Kippur War, written by two central authors of different generations, who had experienced the war closely on the Sinai front. First was published the doctumentary novel "Discovering Elija" ("Giluy Eliyahu") by S. Yizhar (1999). This is the story of what the author had gone through during the last week of the war. It opens in Tassa, in The Sinai Peninsula, a few days after the IDF had started to cross to the west side of the Suez Canal. It continues with The Battle of "The Chinese Farm", which Yizhar had watched from afar, and ends in the city of Suez, a day or two after the deadly trap that had cost the lives of eighty men an sealed the fighting on the south front. S. Yizhar and a handful of friends had

allegedly were drafted as lecturers. In practice they wandered from unit to unit and tried to get the combat soldiers to talk, to lend them an ear, and at times to pass their thoughts and feelings to the higher command.

Indeed, one of the book's hidden strengths is the author's flexible and complex viewpoint, stemming from his non-specific and ever changing position in the scene. He isn't a combat soldier and he isn't even armed, but he stands with the combat soldiers close to where the battles are being fought. At times, he experiences the war from ground level and his point of view is the limited and confused one of a regular soldier, entrenched in a foxhole, because of the danger of being bombed, or crossing the canal enclosed in an armored personal carrier that almost falls of the dilapidated bridge into the water below. At times, he soars in a helicopter to the top of a high mountain and watches the scene of battle below, extending from horizon to horizon. Still other times, he walks along in the tents of headquarters and in war rooms, watching closely how the battle is being managed by the brigade and division commanders and serves them as a welcomed interlocutor. Like the young combat soldiers, he is wholly consumed in the moment's experiences, and yet he examines them out of the weight of life experiences and the historical and literary memory including all of Israel's previous wars, seeing as during The Yom Kippur War, Yizhar was fifty seven years old.

It seems Yizhar had constructed his book as a multilayered and well-orchestrated musical piece – a symphony characterized by a constant change of tone and tempo, changes from packed climaxes to lyrical quiet pauses, and the complex intertwining the elements of action, description and thought.

The book opens with a series of powerful, wide cinematic images, illustrating the horrible chaos of the narrow asphalt road leading southwards from Tassa, as countless vehicles push to make way before crossing the canal. And then, immediately after that, Yizhar describes how silence engulfs the desert when night comes, and how the soldiers find time during these twilight hours to write postcards to their families – postcards dominated by a tone of goodbye and the heart breaking form of a last will and testament. The narrative line shifts between descriptions of feverish battles from the mouth of the soldiers to splendid landscape descriptions; between moments of terror and helplessness and nearly comical episodes, such as the description of a soldier setting up a nightly field shower and thoroughly scrubs every part of his body to his enjoyment and to the enjoyment of many watching him secretly from all sides.

One of the prominent motifs entwined in the rich texture is the discussion Yizhar is having with himself, with his friends and with many soldiers passing him by – the discussion on the question of the war's justification and the very point of it. It is an ongoing polyphonic symposium of sorts, filled with bitterness for the monumental loss of life and consumed with rage for both the political and military leadership. But mostly, the text delivers a clear severe statement against war in general and against the horrible absurdity of futile killing, instead of settling the differences in a process of negotiation that in any case will be initiated after the war, and could just as easily start before it.

All this is relayed in Yizhar's immense power of expression, combining the subtlety of observation and a unique lingual power capable to transform trivial episodes, such as the take-off and landing of a Hercules aircraft, into breathstopping dramas. All the more so when it comes to distinct "Yizhar-esque" scenes placing man

in the vast outdoors, demonstrating his insignificance compared to the indifferent immensity of nature and the universe. One example of this is the description of a violent sand-storm that seems to engulf the whole of the Sinai Peninsula. Another example is the pages-long description of the intelligence officer ejected from a hit aircraft and drifts, as if lost in space, at the height of 10 kilometers. Things reach their ultimate clarity the night the narrator stands on top of Attaka Mountain in extreme cold, gazing at the bright star-filled sky, with their blinding twinkle, "Giant stars that do not care about anything – not whether one lives or dies, not who defeated whom [...] the death of human beings is no business of the night-sky. They are present without touching us, without knowing about us. So beautiful as to be worthy of a hallelujah hymn".

"Discovering Elija" is a product of the rare correlation between a great author's eyesight, expression and vision together with the experience of the war in which he had chosen to place himself out of his own feeling of obligation. This combination had produced a deep enthralling piece – true masterpiece of Hebrew war literature in general.

The second work, and by no means is it secondary in quality, is "Until the End of the Land" ("Isha Borahat MiBsora") by David Grossman (2008). This wide-scale novel traces the tangle of relationships between two men and a woman along a few decades, reflecting a large portion of the history of the state of Israel. At the forefront of the novel is the story of Ora's hike with her close friend Avram from Galilee to Jerusalem, while her son Offer, who is a soldier, takes part in a wide military action. It is in fact an escape journey that Ora initiated in order to slip away from the grave news she fears, and actually, by clinging to a personal magical causality, she tries, in the very act of desperate flea, to prevent the calamity that might befall her. In the meantime, she relates the story of Offer's life and in a way entrusts it to Avram, his biological father whom he has never met, and makes him swear he shall forever keep the story and the memory.

The novel is built upon two central axes, with a tense and opposite relation between them. On the one hand is Ora's fight, out of the primeval force of motherhood and family, for the life of her son that precedes any national collective value. On the other hand is the hegemonic national story, which is mostly masculine in nature, sipping ceaselessly into the personal story and disrupts it. This story is largely based on the chain of wars fought by Israel, from The Six Days War to the major military action in Samaria in the beginning of the 21st century. The focal point of this sequence is The Yom Kippur War. It is the novel's open wound and the chapters devoted to depicting it are some of the highest peaks of the novel. The entire story is intermingled with horrifying descriptions of Avram's experiences as a prisoner of war in Egypt and of the years of torment after he returned, mentally and physically crushed for good. However, the pain's core is exposed completely only towards the end of the book, when Ora tells Avram what she had heard from her husband Ilan, the third leg to their triangle, of the war from his point of view. After Avram had been captured alone in one of the besieged strongholds, guilt-ridden Ilan decided to leave the intelligence base in Um Hashiba where they both served, to try and join him. With difficulty, by ways of trickery, he barely managed to go as far as a nearby stronghold, the soldiers of which had been desperately fighting the Egyptian military. While actively fighting with them, he managed to track Avram's stronghold

by radio and listen in for days to his increasingly rambling monologues, until he and his friends flimsily escape and he is forced to leave Avram behind. All of this, reveals Ora, she Had heard from Ilan, moments before she had gone into labor and gave birth to Offer, son to both her and Avram.

The Yom Kippur War is rooted in the dark ties between the three heroes and it penetrates into the most intimate texture of their relationships and influences their entire lives. Nevertheless, the chapters of direct description of the war, narrow compared to the span of the novel as a whole, also stand alone as a powerful naturalistic portrayal of a few of its strongest and most traumatic facets. David Grossman literally touched the fire, for not in artistic prose nor in documentary literature had the fights for the strongholds ever been described like he had described it; never had the horrible experiences of the prisoners of war and the tough consequences for the returned POWs been depicted in such cruel clarity. Yizhar's panoramic description and Grossman's severe and focused one complement each other, and together they are the strongest literary works written about The Yom Kippur War.

"Discovering Elija" and "Until the End of the Land" mark the fusion of the basic dichotomies characterizing The Yom Kippur War literature from its onset. The separation between professional writers and account-giving soldiers has been blurred, for Yizhar and Grossman both took active part in the war, either as combat soldiers or as close observers. Hence the canonical literature careful avoidance of touching the centers of battle had lost its validity, because these two distinct authors did indeed allow themselves to touch the fire. On the other hand, the documentary accounts themselves had risen to a literary level, thanks to the power and observation of the two authors. The dichotomy between the heroic narrative and the traumatic one had dissolved as well in these two pieces, each one of which had been implemented with both sides: intense chapters of fighting next to a piercing exposure of the wounds of the body and the mind. At the same time, both novels give voice to the severe protest of the soldiers themselves against those responsible for the war and its failures. The very publication of these two important books, twenty five and thirty five years later, is a piece of evidence accumulating with many others – Evidence to the persistent, unrelenting, painful and torturing imprint of this war – jabbed as a wound in Israeli collective memory more than any war that came before it or after it.