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The Talush and the Baal Guf; Portrait of a new Jewish Hero

good intro.
If one were pressed to define in brief the character of the talush, it would be the individual paralyzed by his surroundings and situation into a state of total inactivity. The talush is caught in the vise of his environment. He does not comfortably fit into the society or situation in which he finds himself. Often he chose to put himself in this self-same situation with which he is unable to effectively cope. The talush is dangling and his fate is unresolved.

The three stories, "Revenge", "The Way Out" and "Facing the Forests" portray the talush. Common in the three stories are certain general characteristics of the talush. While written at three different times and by three authors with very different agendas, the main character of each story exhibits a kind of impotence of action. In "Revenge", the returning student vows revenge and plots in his mind how he will carry out his vengeance. However, his resolve to act remains unfulfilled. He is helpless to proceed when confronted with the reality of the destroyed ^{town} village. The old teacher in "The Way Out" can do little more than talk. He resolves in his mind to help the refugees and speaks well to the residents of the farm about the obligation to care for these people. But, his efforts are practically empty gestures. His stammered line when he hears of the refugees' arrival, "in that case surely we have to do something," foretells that in fact he will do very little. The degree of his inability to act is confirmed in the final paragraph of the story. Commenting on the arrival of yet more refugees, he reflects that "they were no longer his concern, he

would not go to them, he was unable to go. He felt relieved."

In "Facing the forests", the student is portrayed from the outset as incapable of making a decision, complacent to just glide by, lost in his own thoughts. One has the impression that plans and schemes and goals are somewhere present in his head. But throughout the story, inactivity and an inability to progress or to advance seem to be the focus of his life. All that advances is time. The student is in the same (metaphysical) place both before and after he enters the forests.

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very nice

Another characteristic these three figures share is namelessness. None of the three have an identity exclusively their own. Each is known and identified ^{only} in their relationships with others. On their own, each remains anonymous and rather unnoticed. The reader must identify the figure in terms of what he does not do or what he does not say. If other characters were not present in the stories, the talush would be yet further obscured by his inactivity and lack of identity. Those with whom the talush comes into contact provide the backdrop with which the reader views the talush. Without the others, the talush would be almost invisible.

Yet a third characteristic shared by all three is a sense of tortured pondering. Everything is very cerebral. The mind is the scene of much of the action. The give-and-take, the emotions, everything is played out in the brain. The problem is that the resolutions are never put into action.

Totally opposite to the portrait of the talush is that of the baal guf. He is not concerned about what other people think. He is

not bound by intellectual constraints. The baal guf is free to be himself and to behave "like a real man" (or woman). He is innocent of the mental anguish and indecision of the talush. He is more at home with animals and with the natural world than with the complicated structures and rules of human society. The Jews of "Kola Street," especially Notte, Rahamim, the three men in "Father and the Boys", and the Girl share the traits of the baal guf. None of these characters use^s language unnecessarily. They prefer action to words. When they do speak, it is in short sentences or even in phrases. Often their language is almost formulaic. The Girl speaks in one word sentences. Rahamim punctuates most sentences with, "His Name is merciful." The reader has an overwhelming sense of earthiness and a fullness to life. The emotions of the baal guf are freely displayed and genuine. When he hurts, he cries. When he is happy, he laughs. Nothing is controlled or measured. This is clearly demonstrated in "Father and the Boys" at the moment Channeh Leah and Shlomo discover that the baby has died. The mood switches in an instant from happiness and tenderness to anger and grief. They respond the way they feel.

"Rahamim" provides an interesting juxtaposition of characters, since one is a baal guf and the other is a talush-figure. Rahamim the porter is constantly moving. It is as if he is propelled by natural forces. He knows where he is headed. He is broad shouldered strong and well-fed, and fairly talkative. Rahamim accepts his lot

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whatever it might be. He is not at all worried about the future. Menashke is slow to move. He wanders aimlessly around the country and around Jerusalem. He is thin, sickly and morose. Nothing is spontaneous. Everything is considered and reasoned. He feels trapped in his situation, unable to change his lot.

The talush envies the freedom of action and the openness of the baal guf. When the two interact, this becomes readily apparent. Instead of acting on his feelings and dealing with his problems, Menashke imagines what Rahamim's home life must be like. It is an ideal. He exhibits a sense of longing. But, he does not do anything about it. He only thinks and fantasizes on what could be.

It has been said that the talush and the baal guf are new kinds of Jewish heroes. They certainly are significantly different from the traditional Jewish hero. The traditional hero believes fervently that prayer and righteousness will bring God's intervention and protection. Humility, submissiveness and faith are highly valued. The hero understands the ^{traditional} society he lives in and knows how it operates and how to live.

The baal guf and the talush are of a new mold. The baal guf is a modern ^{Jewish} hero because he reacts to his surroundings in an earthy instinctive manner. ^{He is a man, not a knight.} If hit, he hits back. He is respected for protecting himself and his best interest. He depends only on himself and does not expect miracles. He has faith, but he ^{even} believes more that

✓ God gives him strength to take care of himself. He is appealing to Jewish writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for his self-sufficiency and natural physicalness. He is the anti-thesis of the stereotypic weak Yeshiva student. These traits are what is needed to build a new people (and a new land).

The talush is a different kind of hero. He exists as a by-product of a developing modern society. He has physically and spiritually left his "old society" and must make his way in a new environment. It is rational, technological and often ideological. The talush is an ideologue, whose hopes and dreams do not always coincide with the reality of the world around him. He is unable to return to his old life and yet he can not cope with his present situation. His heroism comes from his place as a modern Everyman, struggling to find his niche in society. In many ways, the talush represents the struggles of modern life. For this reason, A.B. Yehoshua's student can be grouped with the characters in "The Way Out" and with "Revenge" despite a fifty year gap in their respective composition.

✓ Neither the baal guf nor the talush ^{is an} are ideal figures. This fact is an important reason why they represent two new types of Jewish heroes. There is an element of romanticism present in the character of the baal guf. He is the unspoiled, natural link to the land and the purity of the soul which connection to the land represents. However, even with this vision of the peasant as ideal behind the baal guf, the character is still portrayed as a

real person. The talush must face all the dilemmas inherent in modern society. The modern reader can readily identify with the challenges he faces and the difficulty of decision making. The reader can find a piece of himself within the character of the talush. These are two modern character types. They would be out of place in the old, traditional tale. They make most sense when looked at with a modern eye.

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I would appreciate a copy of this paper for my files.

Very well done, indeed.