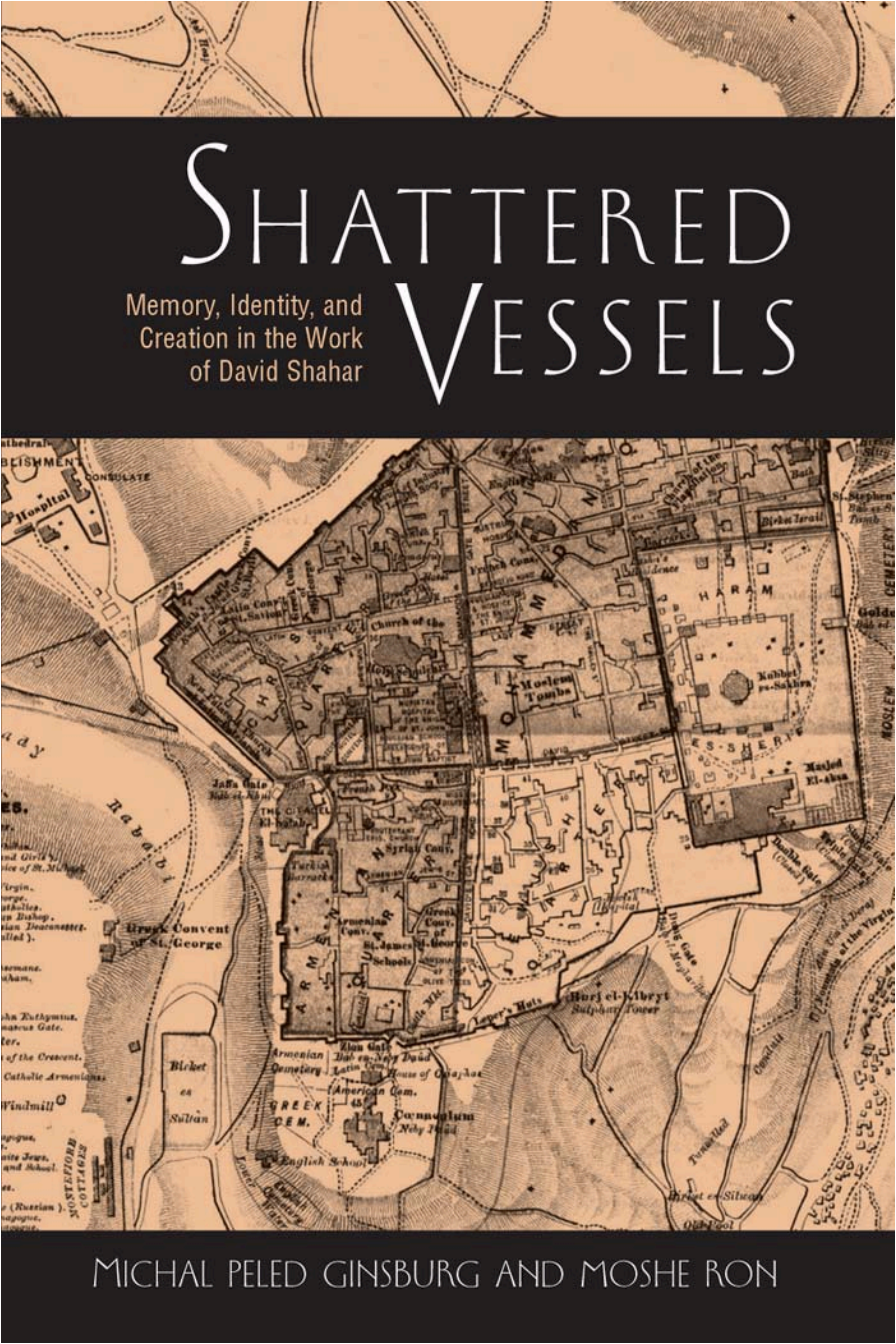
SHATTERED VESSELS

Memory, Identity, and Creation in the Work of David Shahar


HARAM ES-SHERIF
Kubbet es-Sakhra
Masjed El-aksa
Church of the Holy Sepulchre
Moslem Tombs
Jaffa Gate
THE CITADEL
Syrian Conv.
Armenian Conv.
St. James Schools
Turkish Barracks
Greek Convent of St. George
Birket es Sultan
Zion Gate
Armenian Cemetery
GREEK CEM.
American Cem.
English School
Coenaculum
Borj el-Kibryt Sulphur Tower
Leper's Huts
Dung Gate
St. Stephen's
Birket Israil
MONTEFIORE COTTAGES
Windmill
CONSULATE
Hospital

MICHAL PELED GINSBURG AND MOSHE RON

Shattered Vessels

SUNY Series in Modern Jewish Literature and Culture
Sarah Blacher Cohen, editor

Shattered Vessels

Memory, Identity, and Creation in the Work of David Shahar

Michal Peled Ginsburg and Moshe Ron

State University of New York Press

The Northwestern University Research Grants Committee has provided partial support for the publication of this book. We gratefully acknowledge this assistance.

Published by
State University of New York Press, Albany

© 2004 State University of New York

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this book may be used or reproduced
in any manner whatsoever without written permission.
No part of this book may be stored in a retrieval system
or transmitted in any form or by any means including
electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical,
photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior
permission in writing of the publisher.

For information, address State University of New York Press,
90 State Street, Suite 700, Albany, NY 12207

Production by Michael Haggett
Marketing by Fran Keneston

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Ginsburg, Michal Peled, 1947–
Shattered vessles : memory, identity, and creation in the work of David Shahar /
Michal Peled Ginsburg and Moshe Ron
p. cm. — (SUNY series in modern Jewish literature and culture)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-7914-5919-5 (alk. paper) — ISBN 0-7914-5920-9 (pbk. alk. paper)
1. Shahar, David, 1926—Criticism and interpretation. I. Ron, Moshe. II. Title.
III. Series.

PJ5054.S33Z67 2004
892.4'36—dc22

2003069328

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS vii

INTRODUCTION ix

CHAPTER 1 FLIRTING WITH THE UNCANNY 1
Narrative Organization 5
Chronology 7
Identities 15
Uncanny Photo 17

CHAPTER 2 THE EYES OF A WOMAN IN (AND OUT OF) LOVE: CREATION, PAINTING, AND BETRAYAL IN SHAHAR'S FICTION 25
"Of Shadows and the Image" 26
"Of Dreams" 34
"First Lesson" 35
His Majesty's Agent 43
Of Candles and Winds 52

CHAPTER 3 SHAHAR'S JERUSALEM 57
Small World/Liminal Space 58
Space and Plot 66
Heterotopia 74
An Urban Idyll 80

CHAPTER 4 OTHERNESS, IDENTITY, AND PLACE 87
Fluid Identities and Violent Mobs 88
The Portrait of the Narrator As an Arab Chauffeur 95
Exchanging Clothes, Exchanging Places 100
Canaanite, Hebrew, Jew 106
A Cautionary Tale 113

CHAPTER 5 REMEMBERING PROUST 119
Similes of Memory 121
Metaphor and Metonymy 124
Autobiographical Narration 130
Apprenticeship 134
Artists 141

NOTES 149

BIBLIOGRAPHY 175

INDEX 185

Acknowledgments

The authors are grateful to Shulamit Shahar, Meir Shahar, and Madeleine Neige for their cooperation and encouragement. We also wish to thank Murray Baumgarten, Yair Mazor, Alan Mintz, and Henry Sussman for their help and support. We are beholden to Tamar Sofer and Mark Shaeffer for the maps included in this book. We thank Avner Treinin, Hayim Beer, Hanan Hever, and Michal Oren-Nordheim, who discussed with us portions of the manuscript, and Jenny Navot for her friendship and hospitality.

An earlier version of chapter 1 appeared in *Prooftexts* 19 (1999): 151–77. We thank the editor for the permission to reprint.

This page intentionally left blank.

Introduction

At the time of his death, April 2, 1997, David Shahar had not become a household name. He died in France, and his body was transported back home to Jerusalem, where a brief ceremony was held before the funeral procession to the Mount of Olives. A few dozen people gathered in the little plaza outside Beit Hasofer in downtown Jerusalem around a slightly raised stone platform on which the body was laid. Midday traffic was heavy, as usual, in the adjacent streets of this busy commercial district. Some speeches were given. While Avner Treinin, professor of physical chemistry at Hebrew University and a poet, spoke of Shahar's passionate interest in the phenomenon of vision and his intense ambivalence about the mind-body duality, hundreds of high school students began streaming out of the nearby Beit Ha'am auditorium, where they probably had attended an educational program. Some lingered a moment on the crowded sidewalk to stare, by no means disrespectful, obviously nonplussed. Who was this guy? A writer, ah, yes. A Jerusalem writer.

Is this odd event a proper emblem of the saying *Ein navi be'iro*, so often applied to David Shahar? Though he himself was not averse to cultivating the mystique of the prophet unrecognized in his hometown, the notion that he has been totally or willfully ignored is not quite accurate. Not only did he receive important prizes and honors (Agnon Prize, 1973; Prime Minister's Grant 1969, 1978, 1991; Bialik Prize, 1984; Bar-Ilan University Newman Award, 1986–87), but many critics recognized him as one of Israel's foremost novelists, an author whose oeuvre is unique and unparalleled in scope and force.[1] Yet reviewers of Shahar's work also have noted that his reception, both by the general public and by professional critics, has fallen short of what was his due.[2] Given the magnitude and quality of his literary project, his relative marginalization within Israeli culture is in itself of considerable interest.

The reasons for this marginalization are both poetic and ideological (and, in our mind, these two aspects cannot be separated). Poetically speaking, critics were not wrong to read Shahar as a realist who chronicled life in Jerusalem during the British Mandate period. But perhaps because the mimetic aspect of his writing does not easily accommodate national-allegorical or symbolic readings (as do, for example, works by A. B. Yehoshua or Amos Oz), it often was perceived simplistically and reduced by critics to a literal realism of a rather naïve kind: personal reminiscences or a *roman à clef*, an assortment of anecdotes characterized, at best, by vividness and local color. Since the "reality" in question was deemed to have little bearing on the problems and issues at the center of current debates in Israeli culture, his writing could be dismissed as sheer personal nostalgia. This is perhaps why the leading critical voices in Israeli literature have had little or nothing to say about Shahar's work.

As we shall argue in what follows, Shahar's realism involves much more than local color and personal nostalgia. His depiction of Jerusalem during the British Mandate period (which we analyze in chapter 3) projects a sociocultural world that does not embody any historically defined ideological position in the context of the debate around and within Zionism. This is not to say that Shahar engaged in any overt critique of Zionism as such; his personal politics were staunchly nationalistic, and this occasionally rises to the surface of his fiction. Still, the milieu he chose to depict in his major work, the novel sequence *The Palace of Shattered Vessels*, can best be described as an in-between world: his Jerusalem is one that no longer conforms to the values of the Orthodox "Old Yishuv," nor does it fit into any of the other recognized ideological tendencies of the day, least of all labor Zionism. Some of the attitudes manifested in his fiction exhibit an affinity with Canaanite ideas—especially the attitude toward the territory and its traditional material culture—but Shahar can hardly be said to adopt the full Canaanite platform. His mimetic enterprise may be characterized as the personal recreation of an alternative sociocultural world whose demise he elegizes.

Paradoxically, however, Shahar has been described quite often also as someone who rejects "despicable, time-worn" material reality and yearns for "transcendent essences that lie beyond it."[3] Again, there is no doubt that many of Shahar's characters are dreamers and visionaries of one kind or another, and that the narrator himself often is dissatisfied with the world of the here and now. But discontent and dreaming in Shahar do not entail a renunciation of reality or a retreat into a world of pure mind or imagination. If Shahar's realism is not "pure," this is not because he aspires to a realm of the spirit that would transcend, reverse, or supplement material reality but, rather, because he recognizes and contends with the force of desire. With all his insistence on the referentiality of literature, documented in many interviews, his literary texts also stage the dramas of individuals (foremost among them the narrator) motivated by wishes and desires that exceed the boundaries of the real. What is particular about Shahar's poetics is that his longing to free himself from the constraints of empirical reality is paradoxically linked to an unwavering investment in the material and the sensuous. No matter how lacking reality is found to be, no matter how abundant, even excessive, the demands of imagination and desire, in Shahar's world there can be no satisfaction that is not firmly anchored in the empirical. His writing is marked by paradoxical representations—by what we call in chapter 1, a "flirting with the uncanny"—the result of the incommensurability and tension between the laws that govern empirical reality and those that determine desire and the imagination.

The commitment to the reality of the senses is nowhere more obvious than in the highly erotic nature of some of Shahar's writing, with which critics who wish to cast him as longing for a purely spiritual world had a hard time coping. Such critics, therefore, tended either to ignore this aspect of his writing or to be scandalized by it, branding it as shameful and a sellout to the base tastes of the uncultivated public.[4] But, as we shall argue in chapter 2, in Shahar's world, the erotic and the sexual, with all of their attending ambivalences, are inseparable from artistic creation. The artist-surrogates appearing in the short stories and novels (especially *His Majesty's Agent*) privilege the art of painting as a personal act of creation, not only emulating divine creation itself but doing so in its own medium of light, color, and matter. What is peculiar to these Shaharian protagonists is that the space of visuality is both made available and denied to them by the agency of a woman, initially the mother and subsequently other female figures exempt from the incest taboo. The turning away from the male protagonist of the loving gaze of a woman is experienced as an offense to his very maleness and/or as a fatal blow to his ability to paint. Such narrative moments are the closest analogue to the metaphor of the "breaking of the vessels" derived from the account of creation in Lurianic Kabbala—a catastrophe of enormous magnitude. Thus Shahar's great cosmological, metaphysical, and aesthetic themes both concern the world of the senses and are inscribed within highly eroticized interpersonal patterns.

Shahar's strong commitment to the body may also be seen as a corollary of the investment in "place" or "territory." The relation between place and identity (which we discuss in chapter 4) is raised in Shahar's *Palace* novels both implicitly and explicitly, both in phenomenological and even metaphysical terms (e.g., through the problematic of the relation of body to soul), and in a way that relates clearly to the national question and conflict over the land between Jews and Arabs. It is in the latter context that Shahar's specific brand of Zionism, strongly tinged with the Canaanite privileging of the territory as a source of national and cultural identity, comes most explicitly to the fore.

Shahar's critics (and he himself) liked to point out his ideological or political "apartness," his refusal to belong to literary or political cliques.[5] This characterization was used primarily to explain his relative isolation from the mainstream of literary and cultural life in Israel, but what is surely more interesting is that this "apartness" translates into or derives from a conception of identity dramatized in his fiction. Shahar's individualism is not simply a sociological fact or a psychological character trait of the man but a basic mode of conceiving the relation between personal identity and a group—be it national, ethnic, or racial. As we argue in chapter 4, his marked investment in unorthodox individuals (people who escape definition in terms of group affiliation) is part and parcel of his view of individual identity as fluid, heterogeneous to the point of being self-contradictory, free to change; rigid, well-demarcated definitions are, in contrast, the hallmarks of "group identity," and they are repeatedly depicted as fostering violence. The valorization of flexibility and fluidity is certainly linked to the poetics of the uncanny where, through the narrator's practice of entering the experiential domain—one would almost say "the body"—of other characters, the boundaries between self and other become shifting and porous. This has some consequences on the thematic level: it accounts, for example, for the importance in Shahar's work of the figure of the "Oriental" (or "Levantine") represented both by the Sephardi Jew and by the Arab. Though the view of the "Oriental" as being "fluid" or having no stable identity may strike us as banal (given that it is a common stereotype), the fact that this mode of being is generally valorized in Shahar's fiction goes a long way toward reducing the alterity of the Oriental. In particular, it establishes a continuity between the representations of the Arab and Sephardi Jew, in contrast to the prevailing tendency of much Zionist discourse to make the strongest possible case for their difference. In contrast to the fluid Oriental is the violent "other"—the other who lost his or her individuality by being absorbed into an homogenizing group (represented by both the Ashkenazi orthodox Jew and the Arab).

This already suggests that the highly personal narrative of the *Palace* novels is not at all indifferent to the social and political issues that are at the center of Israeli culture. But it also suggests that Shahar's way of approaching these issues is very different from that of mainstream authors not only of his own biological generation (e.g., Shamir or Megged) but also of "*dor hamedina*" (Yehoshua and Oz). His narrative does not deal with "collectives" (except to denounce them as violent mobs), and the individuals he describes are both idiosyncratic and somewhat indeterminate—hence, they cannot allegorically represent a collective. The nonallegorical nature of most of Shahar's writings means that the reality he depicts, rich and varied as it may be, is not posited as a totality, and his realism is not the synecdochical one of "part for the whole." This can be seen most clearly in his representation of Jerusalem: as we argue in chapter 3, unlike most writers on Jerusalem who see the city as a totality because they attribute to it an "essence" (which, in turn, explains why it can function as a powerful symbol), Shahar chooses to focus in the *Palace* sequence on a part of Jerusalem that lacks a homogenous identity and whose "otherness" bars it from standing as part for the whole.

The reluctant acceptance of Shahar as a major author by Israeli critics has been compared, *ad nauseam*, with the warm reception he received in France, where he won, in 1981, the prestigious Prix Médicis Etranger and where he was hailed as "the Israeli Proust." The comparison of Shahar to Proust, which has become a cliché of Shahar criticism, has mostly been based on a superficial understanding of both Proust and Shahar. In chapter 5 we revisit this analogy in order to show the important differences in the way these two authors approached issues crucial to both: time, memory, art, and autobiography. Rather than being an "Israeli Proust," Shahar is an author whose take on the issues central to both Romanticism and modernist fiction is both specific and complex.

Throughout our critical engagement with Shahar's work, we have tried to remain attuned to his narrative art. The temporal disjointedness of his associative style will not have escaped even a casual reader of his fiction. What repeated and more focused reading reveals is the depth and pervasiveness of some of these patterns. Analogies, connections, and verbal echoes appear—often unexpectedly—across vast stretches of text and many years of writing acitivity. The astonishing richness and coherence of these clusters of meaning make it possible to tease out of Shahar's work a complex position on matters both poetic and ideological—a position that, for the most part, his writings do not expound in direct expository fashion.

A Note on Texts and Translations

In the following pages, all references to Shahar's works will be given parenthetically in the text, with the Hebrew original followed by the English translation (when available). Translations were silently modified when a more precise literal translation was needed; when no English version was available, translations are our own. Emphasis in quotes is ours, unless otherwise indicated.

The following editions of Shahar's works are referred to in this text:

The Pope's Mustache. Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1982; *The Death of the Little God*. Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1982. These two collections gather together all of Shahar's short stories previously published in *Of Dreams* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1955), *Caesar* (Tel Aviv: Agudat Hasofrim/Dvir, 1960), and *The Fortune Teller* (Tel Aviv: Agudat Hasofrim/Massada, 1966). Some of Shahar's short stories appeared in English translation in *News From Jerusalem* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

His Majesty's Agent (Tel Aviv: Hadar, 1979). English translation by Dalia Bilu (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, 1980).

The Palace of Shattered Vessels: I. *Summer in the Street of the Prophets* (Merhavia and Tel Aviv: Sifriat Po'alim, 1969); II. *A Voyage to Ur of the Chaldees* (Merhavia and Tel Aviv: Sifriat Po'alim, 1971); III. *Day of the Countes*s (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Po'alim, 1976); IV. *Nin-Gal* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1983); V. *Day of the Ghosts* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1986); VI. *A Tammuz-Night's Dream* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 1988); *The Nights of Lutetia* (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 1991); VII. *Of Candles and Winds* (Jerusalem: Yedi'ot Aharonot, 1994). A boxed, revised edition, including *Of Candles and Winds* (as the seventh "gate") but excluding *The Nights of Lutetia* (listed on the frontispiece as an eighth novel, classified as *hasha'ar hasatum*, the blocked gate), appeared shortly before Shahar's death (Jerusalem: Sifriat Hasha'ot, 1996). We have referred in this book to some of the changes that Shahar made in revising; we have, however, kept quotations and page references as they appear in the original publication, since the revised edition, of which only 120 copies were printed, is not widely available. The first two volumes of the *Palace* were translated into English by Dalia Bilu and appeared in one volume (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988).

To the Mount of Olives (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1998) (a posthumously published fragment).

In this book we do not refer to Shahar's early novel, *The Moon of Honey and Gold* (published originally in 1959), or to his children's book, *The Adventures of Riki Maoz* (published originally in 1960).

Chapter 1

Flirting with the Uncanny

Somewhere near the middle of the first volume of David Shahar's novel sequence *The Palace of Shattered Vessels*, the narrator describes a scene he witnessed many years before. He was a ten-year-old boy sitting on the verandah reading a book (Bialik's adaptation of *Don Quixote*) when judge Dan Gutkin, a Jewish magistrate under the British Mandate administration, came to pay a visit to the landlady, Mrs. Gentilla Luria, the widow of Yehuda Prosper Bey:

> The Officer of the British Empire climbed the steps to the home of his old friend the Officer of the Ottoman Empire, who had departed this world only a few weeks before, reaching the verandah just as the Jerusalem widow of the departed was shutting herself in her room and her sister, Pnina, was drawing up the three-legged iron table standing in the middle of the flagged floor to the red plush armchair which had been kept up till then for the exclusive use of Yehuda Prosper Bey. As soon as he had seated himself in the armchair with his face toward the setting sun, Pnina hurried off to bring him some biscuits and a cold drink. (*Summer,* 101; 84)

This description, quite typical of Shahar's style, is replete with precise spatiotemporal notations and correlations. First, the immediate scene itself: Judge Gutkin reached the verandah "just as" Mrs. Luria "was shutting herself in her room"; "As soon as he had seated himself," her sister, Pnina, "hurried off" for refreshments. Then, the recent past of the individuals involved: the decease, several weeks earlier, of Yehuda Prosper Bey, which, among other consequences, brought to an end his “exclusive use” of that particular armchair. The long-standing relationships among the characters, too, have an implicit temporal dimension: the judge had once been the Bey’s protégé, and Pnina had once been her sister’s rival for his affections. The reference to the two men as officers of two different empires enriches the passage with the notion of historical change, the British having displaced the Ottoman Empire in Palestine some eighteen years before the time of the scene (of course, both the publication of the book and the narrator’s recollection take place after a further change, with the State of Israel replacing the British Mandate). There is perhaps a touch of irony in that the officer of an empire on which the sun never sets should take a seat “facing the setting sun.” This particular detail evokes even more readily a symbolic sense of the waning of life toward decrepitude and death. Returning to the logic of the scene itself, the failure of Mrs. Luria to welcome her visitor in person is due to her reluctance to show the ravages that time and neglect brought on her physical appearance.

Taking this analysis one step farther, we might note that spatiotemporality here is profoundly linked to notions of identity and potential rivalry. In a reality understood by empirical and rational principles, time is irreversible, and two entities cannot occupy the same place at the same time. Thus the Ottoman Empire had to give way to the British one, and unless Yehuda Prosper Bey had disappeared, Judge Dan Gutkin might not have been seated in his armchair.

This latter image, however, produces in the narrator at first a different, powerful reaction:

> Meanwhile I was flooded with a sense of uncomprehending wonder, delightful and frightening at the same time, as if I had suddenly stepped into a magic palace, at the sight of the judge with his mane of white hair combed severely back from his forehead on both sides of the middle parting above the square-jawed assertiveness of his lean face, lowering his strong limbs into the armchair of the old Bey, who used to sit up excitedly and call out “Of course, of course” as he drew a large red handkerchief over his smoothly shaven, shining head to wipe away the beads of sweat sparkling like fireworks in the setting sun. The picture of the old Bey, as I had last seen him before his death, sitting on this red armchair with the checked scarf his Jerusalem wife had wrapped around his neck, his hoarse old voice shouting in impotent rage “Our master Moses, our master Moses,” superimposed itself on the picture of the judge sitting on the same old verandah in the same armchair without either picture blotting the other out, blurring or erasing its lines to the slightest degree, and my heart feared and expanded in an abundance of joyful wonder in the palace in which I had suddenly found myself. (101–102; 85)

The scene, then, is perceived as a telescoping of two moments in time, and the elation it produces in the narrator is attributable to an apparent victory over the destructive irreversibility of time and/or the mutual exclusion of personal identities. The characterization of his sense of wonder as "uncomprehending" suggests a perspective other than that of a ten-year-old boy. That it could be articulated retrospectively, at a distance of many years, is itself another implied triumph over mutability and oblivion. At the same time, this delayed coming-to-significance bears all of the hallmarks of that *Nachträglichkeit* Freud associated with the retroactive emergence of trauma.[1]

Several such moments, in which a person long lost seems to come back to life or is suddenly glimpsed in another, or a situation recurs with apparently the full force of its original occurrence, are to be found in *The Palace of Shattered Vessels*.[2] A reader of European literature will recognize here an experience (or a narrative trope) akin to, if not at all points identical to, Proustian privileged moments of remembrance or Wordsworthian "spots of time." Shahar's term here for such a moment is the word "palace," a choice that may seem odd to the uninitiated but whose importance is underlined by its figuring in the general title of the novel sequence.

First it must be noted that the Hebrew word rendered here as "palace" is not *armon,* usually used to designate a royal abode, but *heikhal*, which can also mean "shrine," that is, a holy place, and often is used in connection with the Holy Temple itself. More specifically, the key to the use of this term by Shahar is to be found in the literature of the Kabbala. Indeed, any reader alerted to this connection must recognize immediately that all the elements of the general title (as well as the subtitle, *Lurian*, dropped from later volumes but reintroduced in the revised edition) point in the same direction.[3] In early Kabbalistic literature, "Palaces" (*Heikhalot*) were texts describing the mystical ascension to the celestial palaces and the meeting with the "King of Kings"; the latter is depicted as seated on a celestial throne in the seventh of these palaces and is described in great anthropomorphic detail. Since the ascension of the mystic follows in reverse the process of creation, it leads him back from the world of plurality and particularization to the original divine unity.[4] We cannot, at this stage, point to any closer parallels between the Heikhalot literature of the second to fifth century A.D. and Shahar's work. For our purpose here, suffice it to say that in this passage Shahar uses the word "palace" specifically to designate the locus of a quasimystical encounter. The centering of the scene on a father/judge figure on a thronelike seat also contributes to this parallel. What makes the experience mystical is the appearance of freedom from the limitations of empirical existence, in particular, from the irreversibility and destructiveness of time rather than any other divine attributes of power or holiness. And yet the mystical encounter occurs most emphatically on the ground of empirical reality. In Shahar's fiction, on certain extraordinary but not all-too-rare occasions, the divine, thus understood, is glimpsed precisely in the mundane.

The "abundance" (*shefa'*) characteristic of such experiences is precisely the overdetermination or excess disallowed by a rational-empirical conception of reality governed by the law of excluded middle. And here, as elsewhere in *The Palace of Shattered Vessels*, this cannot last longer than a brief instant, as the text continues: "But the palace vanished as suddenly as it had appeared, and with it the picture of the old Bey, and I said to myself, 'No, it's quite impossible that this red chair should have room enough for both of them, the old man and the judge as well—and besides, the old man's dead and gone'" (102; 85–86). Why should the exhilaration of the palace disappear so abruptly? The text presents it as a sober return to common sense, but surely that is just what the narrator's consciousness had to take leave of in order to have its quasimystical experience in the first place. A stronger explanation is suggested by the ambivalence characterizing this experience from the start: it has always been both "delightful" and "fearful," caused the heart to both "fear" and "expand."

Affective ambivalence such as this often accompanies accounts of mystical experience. If transcending the destructive power of time appears desirable, then the abolition of the difference between life and death (and, even more so, between the living and the dead) can be felt as a threat to life. Likewise, the union with the absolute being of the divinity is the ultimate goal of mystical yearning, but at the same time it spells the dissolution of the subject's personal identity. Certainly in Shahar, as our subsequent discussions will show, personal identity as the locus of desire is a *sine qua non*, the basis for any possible development. The awe inspired by the palace experience is also plain fear.

Such affective ambivalence characterizes as well the experience Freud discusses in his essay "The Uncanny" ("Das Unheimliche," 1919). Freud there talks about situations where the subject is suddenly faced with an aspect of external reality that bears a powerful and close kinship with something buried deep in his unconscious (a repressed complex or a stage of development presumably long since overcome). When this aspect of reality assumes anthropomorphic features, the subject is faced with what has been called a "double." Freud highlights the intense affective ambivalence elicited by such figures, giving it a temporal inflection. Originally, he writes, the double was "an insurance against the destruction of the ego," "an energetic denial of the power of death," but such belief in the indestructibility of the self is relinquished when the evidence of empirical reality begins to assert itself. The double then reverses its aspect, inspiring terror instead of joy: "From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death."[5]

Placing his poetic, personal version of the topos of the *Heikhal* so early in his text, Shahar invites us to consider it as emblematic of the work as a whole. We can then read the scene as indicative of a tension in his poetics between two elements: on the one hand, an "adult," prosaic commitment to a rational-empirical conception of reality; on the other hand, an ambivalent fascination with the suspension of rules governing such a reality.

Of course, the former, grown-up conception does not necessarily amount to a naive belief in a strictly "objective" reality, but it does presuppose a discrete self with a sensorium, a consciousness, and a memory relating to a world that is actually "out there," a world of linear temporality and well-defined identities. Positing such a world is the foundation of realist poetics and, indeed, it is in his success as a mimetic writer that critics of Shahar often locate his unique power. Thus, for instance, the most assiduous of Shahar scholars, Sarah Katz:

> For Shahar is, after all, one of the most gifted novelists in our literature, and he represents his creative world and the Jerusalem milieu in a manner so plastic and colorful, so authentic and convincing, that the fictional story appears to be literally true [*emet la-amita*]. Shahar's characters are so fresh and credible, so energetic and lively, that the reader feels as though she has met them in reality, somewhere in the streets of Jerusalem or one of its neighborhoods, in a café, a garden, or one of their private basement love-nests.[6]

The other element, opposed to a rational-empirical conception of reality and to a straightforward mimetic poetics, is more complex and somewhat more difficult to describe. We believe it can be accounted for in three ways. First, it often appears as a mystical yearning to transcend or transgress the limitations of plain reality (but then, Shahar can no longer be committed to any traditional, let alone institutional, religious discipline). Second, and no less frequently, it may be construed as a privileging of what Freud called "primary process," where time is reversible and distinctions between self and other tend to blur. Finally, it manifests itself in narrative patterns that, through repetition, doubling, and the blurring of borderlines, challenge the punctuality of events, the linearity of time, and the discrete existence of individuals. It is the interplay between these two commitments and the paradoxical representations that it generates that this chapter sets out to explore.

NARRATIVE ORGANIZATION

The remarkable opening paragraph of *Summer in the Street of the Prophets* (and of the whole *Palace* sequence) posits as a general framework the voice of a narrator recounting experiences recalled from the past, by way of autobiographical, retrospective narration:

> Light and cistern water, the mouth of the cave and the rock at its side: these four have been connected in my memory with the figure of Gabriel Jonathan Luria ever since the time he came to stay in our house when I was a child. From Paris he came straight to our house, and since he entered the yard just before the King of Abyssinia entered the Ethiopian Consulate across the road—which is to say, just as I was drawing water from the cistern—his figure was fixed in my memory as rising from its mouth together with the pail of water splashing radiant, dancing light in all directions, which I was drawing up with a peculiar kind of pleasure from its bottom: rising and opening like the Japanese paper flower in its glass of water which he himself was later to buy me from Hananiah's toy shop. (9; 7)

As a global motivating device, this framework allows for associative leaps and bounds, an episodic and nonlinear organization of plot materials, while at the same time not relinquishing the claim that the contents of these memories might be pieced together into some coherent reality. Wherever this reality does not meet the requirements of external verisimilitude, one expects it at least to be attributable to the consciousness of the narrator. The focus on consciousness may go so far as to make the very plot assume the appearance of being the story of this consciousness. Indeed, the very title of the work leads one to expect it to constitute a piecing together of memories and experiences into some sort of architectural whole.

At the center of the narrator's reminiscences stands Gabriel Jonathan Luria (who gave the sequence its subtitle "Lurian"), with whom the novel opens and who dominates the seventh and last "gate."[7] He is the son of old Yehuda Prosper Bey, former Consul of Spain in Jaffa, and his much younger wife, Gentilla, in whose house the narrator lives as a boy. The narrator meets Gabriel upon his return to Jerusalem after a long stay in France and tells of what he saw of him that summer, up to the moment at which Gabriel kills an Arab rioter, is arrested, and then is released. But the narrator also tells of Gabriel's life prior to his departure for France, especially his love for Orit (often called Orita) Gutkin, the beautiful and proud daughter of Judge Dan Gutkin, with whom he had a stormy love affair, as well as his concurrent liaison with Bella, the wife of Fat Pesach (co-owner of the Café Cancan). Following his ten-day fling with Orit at the King David Hotel, Gabriel leaves for France, ostensibly to study medicine; some time later, Orit (possibly pregnant by him) marries the much older Dr. Landau, a famous ophthalmologist. We are told also of Gabriel's life in France: upon finding out that he dropped out of medical school, his father cuts him off financially, and during the last year of his stay, he becomes a simple farmhand in Brittany.

The narrator was also acquainted in his childhood with some of Gabriel's friends, and he relates episodes from their lives prior to and following Gabriel's