NEW PERSPECTIVES ON THE AKEDAH: BEFORE AND AFTER THE 1970S

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The story of the akedah, in its biblical as well as midrashic versions, has been long recognized as a seminal meta-narrative through which Israeli culture has been conducting its intergenerational dialogue. It is generally accepted that the most significant turning point in the literary uses of this meta-narrative took place in the stormy 1970s. Reflecting the political turmoil of the decade, the figure of “national sacrifice” has been subjected to revision and subversion, becoming the fulcrum of a public debate over issues of identity, ideology and collective moral responsibility.
Until recently, this literary discourse had been considered to be a purely patriarchal scene. Recent scholarship, however, has begun to uncover the underside of this picture: Although few and far between, female voices seem to have recently [1980?] joined this male-dominated conversation, offering new female-centered alternatives.

This double-session panel seeks to elaborate on this recent modification by offering new perspectives on poetic and fictional rewritings of the akedah across accepted divisions of generations, genres and genders. Its first part, Unsung Precursors: 1920s-1960s, will complicate the hegemonic patriarchal imaginary of the akedah narrative by introducing little-known female sacrificial narratives by male writers as early as the 1920s, as well as metaphorical uses of the akedah in women’s poetry as early as the 1930s. Its second part, Revisions and Alternatives: 1990-2000, will problematize the ostensibly masculinist base of a seminal sacrificial narrative by Yehoshua, and will offer fresh insights into recent Israeli novels, in which female authors [Castel-Bloom, Aini, and G. Hareven] have revisited the meta-narrative of self-sacrifice, offering innovative revisions, subversions and alternatives.

The analyses proposed in these papers, informed by various psychoanalytic, feminist and narratological approaches, will unearth forceful encounters, in which authors wrestle with the akedot of their forefathers and foremothers alike, groping for new positions wherein old divisions and timelines seem hopelessly inadequate.