MUSICALITY, STRUCTURE AND CLOSURE IN THE POEMS OF NATAN ZACH

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The Language of Zach’s Shirim shonim is a distilled, almost purified Hebrew. In addition, the poems are often written in free verse, with loose structure. In my lecture I will attempt to demonstrate the purity of diction in these early texts and show that despite the supposed rejection of exact rhyme and meter, many of those early poems employ the traditional tools in a covert way. The hidden structure and sound system not only carry meaning, but at times serve as the main locus of significance.

The Zachian poetics described above will be juxtaposed with Kevan shani ba-seviva which was published 40 years later. In it, the Hebrew is no longer “pure”, rather, it is engaged in dialogue with other linguistic and geographic landscapes, especially German. Furthermore, the latent musicality of the early volume gives way to quasi “Poems en Prose” in the 1996 collection. Although the transformation in Zach’s poetics was gradual, my presentation will not show this progression. Instead, it will focus on the extremes, and examine the bookends of his poetry, the early and the late.

Special attention will be given to the closure of Zach’s poems as indicator of the shifts in his perception of the poetic text. What seemed to be “open ended” in Shirim shonim was sometimes almost neatly sealed, while the opposite may be true in the 1996 volume.