[Hebrew]
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A Hedgerow of Hostility and Animosity

In her third novel *Borderlife* (“Gader Haya” [Hedgerow] in Hebrew), Dorit Rabinian shifts the reader's attention from the large exotic families at the center of her previous novels to their single members. Unlike her first novel, *Omerijan* (1995), which takes place in a small Persian village at the beginning of the twentieth century, and her second novel, *Our Weddings* (1999), which moves between Persia, India and Turkey to Israeli immigrant towns, Rabinian's third novel is a love story located in New York. Liat, an Israeli student, and Hilmi, a Palestinian artist, accidentally meet at a New York coffee shop. Away from their hometowns, friends and families, they try to create their own buffer zone, but the Arab-Israeli conflict is rooted deep into their relationship. Visits from family members, phone calls from relatives, and chance meetings with past (or present) acquaintances infiltrate the "no-man's-land" they create at the heart of the big city, threatening its delicate balance. Rabinian's version of the ‘boy meets girl’ theme inevitably becomes, because of the characters' nationality and in spite of themselves, a political story.

The title Rabinian chooses for her novel, "Hedgerow" – "live fence" in Hebrew (i.e., a fence of live vegetation), alludes to the West Bank barrier, alternately referred to as the "separation fence" or "separation wall" (depending on the political attitude of the speaker). In that sense, one can describe Rabinian's two characters as standing on two opposite sides of the fence. Their love story evokes an old and tragic tale, the story of Pyramus and Tysbe, as well as H.N. Bialik's famous story "Behind the Fence," which describes a forbidden love story that crosses a strict ethnic-religious line. To these literary fences one might add "The Good Fence" which stood (figuratively) between Israel and Lebanon, expressing a wishful attempt at normality, and symbolizing the corrected relationship between Israel and Lebanon's Maronite
(Christian) population. This wide range of associations, lost in the translation, enriches Rabinian's text and emphasizes its message.

Liat and Hilmi meet in December and spend the three weeks between Thanksgivings and Christmas together, "awake at night and asleep during the day" (p. 99), remaining inseparable throughout the winter months until May, when Liat's visa expires. Liat goes back to Tel Aviv and Hilmi comes to visit his family in Ramallah after a four-year absence. Standing on the roof of the family's apartment, he watches Tel Aviv's lights at night, so close and yet so distant. A trip to Tel-Aviv beach, to the blue sea for which he has yearned his entire life (a longing expressed in his vivid paintings which use all kinds of blue: ink, indigo, navy, light blue, turquoise, baby blue, midnight blue, lagoon blue, porcelain blue, cobalt blue, peacock blue, hyacinth blue, snail blue, and so on), culminates in his death.

On the edge of summer the Mesopotamian fertility god Tammuz (the name of the tenth month of the Hebrew calendar) would descend to the underworld, and remain there until autumn. His coming back to life with the first drops of rain was celebrated in orgiastic rituals all throughout the Near East. Rabinian, who gives her current-day version of the ancient archetypal rebirth myth, does not revive the young artist who drowns on the brink of summer, covered with seaweed. Unlike his mythological counterparts (Tammuz, Oziris, Adonis, and even Jesus) Hilmi, the literal sacrifice on the "altar" of a violent political conflict, will not be saved (Naomi Shemer's popular lyrics "it is sad to die in the middle of the Tammuz" echoes in mind).

The novel is divided into three parts, correlating with three seasons: autumn, winter, summer. Autumn, the season, which opens the year in the Hebrew calendar, marks the beginning of the love story, and summer, Middle East's arid season, which resonates an ending to Hebrew ears (because of the etymological link between "kayits"-summer and "kets"-end), brings the story to its conclusion. Winter, described in the novel as one of the coldest in New York history, serves as the lovers' isolated nest, while spring – the season of bloom and hope – has no part in the novel; although the Nowruz, the first day of spring according to the ancient Zoroastrian tradition
preserved in an old legend, is celebrated in a festive ceremony by the small Persian-American community, while a snowstorm rages outside.

Like the female protagonist of the ancient rebirth myths, who is typically older than her gentle lover boy, Rabinian's female character is slightly older than her dreamy lover, and much more realistic. She understands that there is no way to break through the hedgerow of prejudice and animosity, which stands between the two communities. And although her fragile and doomed artist (who doesn’t know how to drive, or shoot, or swim) is far from the terrorist type, Rabinian does not delude her readers on the prospects of the love story intertwined with the harsh nationalistic feelings that stand between the two nations and block any attempt of reconciliation.

Liat (li-to me, at-you [f.] – "you belong to me"), the name Rabinian chooses for her female character, is not coincidental in a novel at whose bottom lie a territorial controversy and issues of sovereignty, nor is the fact that the novel is structured around the seasons of the year, which bear ancient (pagan) cultural connotations. At the center of the unresolved conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis stands the land. "Mother Earth" plays a major role in the dispute, which goes far back to mythological eras, when the land was worshipped as a deity. The current love story, which Rabinian tells, is rooted deep in the soil of the land divided between two nations, whose people refuse to let go of any of the sacred earth clods.