

## *An Interview with Yitzhak Orpaz*

TIR: I would like to begin with something I mentioned to you some time ago. *Ants* is an unusual piece of fiction. Would you explain how you came to write it?

YO: I think it began from a very personal situation. I mean, I was at that time—at the time I was writing—in a kind of quarrel with all the world: domestic, with friends, with my work, even with the neighbor's dog. And I had to run away somewhere. All my childhood and youth, I was fascinated with ants . . . I remember at least a couple of places in the Bible: first, in a parable in the Old Testament. It says, go to the ant, learn her ways and be wise. Now, I read the Bible very early—at four, five or six—and those things had a very great effect on me. And then I began to see the ants and I began to look at how they live and how they work. Then another place in the Bible, I came across the description by one of the prophets of a plague that will come. He describes not the ants but . . . what do you call the . . .

TIR: Locusts.

YO: . . . locusts . . . I didn't see the locusts but I saw the ants. And as I worked on the piece, when I described the ants, I felt the ants were a kind of locust, the same tribe. So it was for me just the most natural thing in the world to run away to the ants. Just to run away there, especially in the very house where I lived. It was an old house, and the ants were just walking there in and out like it was their own. Once, I got up in the night and went to the lavatory. I saw some cockroaches in a kind of ritual procession. It appeared to me that way. Then I began to think: dream is mixing with reality. When I began writing *Ants*, I woke in a kind of half-dream; I lost the feeling of being asleep or awake. It was summer, very hot. I didn't have to dress. I was naked. I remember getting in and out of bed, writing, having a drink, writing, sitting and then going on writing without sleep or without really being awake. It worked. Very ecstatically.

TIR: What did you have in mind for the ants? You wrote the scene with the cockroach in the lavatory, but not simply as a piece of realism. What else did you have in mind?

YO: A powerful thing! Something powerful. But I cannot say so easily what. Perhaps the movement, the activity. I mean, in the lavatory, I was looking and I really saw the ritual . . . the ants take the cockroach that is still alive and dismember it. And yet I am equally sure I saw it in my fantasy. I saw them neutralize it by catching the two antennae, pulling it apart from both sides. Then I saw a procession, a kind of funeral. It was fascinating! As observer, I had the time—I was in a kind of apocalyptic mood—and I wanted to see everything falling apart . . . the ultimate destruction. Yet, at the same time I wanted to have the Great God take me by the hand and lead me out of there!

TIR: To safety . . . beyond destruction.

YO: No, no, no. It's not that. How do you say . . . it's a . . . what is it? It's like both things at once.

TIR: Like a contradiction?

YO: Yes, a contradiction. It came with all the great and the terrible, the fascinating, and also with the pulse of creation and with the pulse of destruction at the same time. Sometimes I feel that the ants in the story are not outside of me, that they are still working inside me.

TIR: Then, what of Rachel? The association that comes to mind is how white she is, how virginal, how pure; and yet, her relationship with her woman servant suggests a lesbian relationship.

YO: It is suggested. But also to me, Rachel belonged to a world that I lusted after, I craved to destroy, to take apart. That world was a virgin; it was a world I couldn't get to. It was a kind of heavenly world that you couldn't reach.

TIR: Something illusory? And also Biblical.

YO: Yes. Now it's very interesting that my wife and also some others—the illustrator of the Hebrew text, for example—said to me, “Do you know what you wrote? You wrote a book about the anatomy of the behavior of a frigid woman.” I don't know—they probably knew what they were talking about. I didn't know a lot about these things—the frigid woman and so on. To me, it was so much more. To me, she was both Rachel in the Bible and Rachel's servant woman, Bilhah. This pair of women has always fascinated me. In the Judaistic tradition, Rachel is the woman to whom all the barren women pray to open their wombs, to make them fertile. She is also the beloved wife of Jacob who eventually dies in childbirth. Earlier though, with Bilhah, she gave children to Jacob. On her knees with Bilhah, she gave the children. I don't understand how it worked, but in your imagination you can understand it's as if both women were one . . . one body, with two sides.

TIR: When Ishmael Reed visited the International Writers' Program, Peter Nazareth mentioned to you that there was something in the relationship between Rachel and the servant that reminded him of characters in Reed's first novel, *Freelance Pallbearers*. Bukka's wife has a friend, a woman, and they're always doing thing between themselves and leaving him out. This frustrates him, of course, and leaves the women to a closed world which he is not permitted to enter.

YO: Rachel does belong to a closed world. I'm sure of that. In my fantasy, she belongs to the pagan world. Somewhere in the story she is described as a kind of young Roman soldier in a toga. I cannot exactly know where to put her rightly. She must be one of the middle links to some final fulfillment, some final miraculous happening. Anyway, it seemed to me very stupid to say to my critics that Rachel is a kind of phenomenon of her frigid behavior . . . I was more interested in how Jacob gets to her.

TIR: How does he get her? She seems always ahead of him, fulfilling the role of some godly agency. What are they doing? That is the great mystery.

YO: By fighting off the ants and also by fighting Rachel, he comes to admire them and to admire her. Here you have what I have written of elsewhere, the classical secular pilgrim journey, which is a journey of “I run from you to you.” I heard Bert Schierbeck very wisely add, “I run from you to you in the same direction.” In the

story, that means they are going all the time into the direction of the impossible. As I see it, it's like the basic conflict between the mind that wants to be reasonable and fight off intrusion and of the heart that sees great prospects for all barriers being removed, the barriers of the flesh, the barriers of physical walls. As the ants in the story hollow out the walls of the house, the flesh of the two people becomes hollowed so that the barriers—the material barriers—are removed toward some great happening.

In the Judaistic tradition, there is a tale about people who have done a lot of good and a lot of bad on the earth and they have to be judged where to be sent. Before a decision is given, they have to walk a narrow path between a river of fire and a river of frost. Now the river of fire is the heart, the longing, the need for absolute fulfillment; and the river of frost, of course, is the reason. It tends always to define and to freeze things. As I see it, this is the main conflict of the secular pilgrim. The secular pilgrim cannot commit himself to either of these. He cannot throw himself altogether into the river of fire. That would be a suicide of the reason. So, for example, he doesn't accept the church. He cannot commit himself reasonably to a church because his reason denies the church. He is longing for something pure, new, not yet established. On the other hand, he won't allow himself to be drawn into the river of frost because that would be to give up his longing, his feeling. So, he will be on his way on the narrow path, a very difficult and terrible path. If he walks it rightly, in my opinion, he doesn't resolve the conflict. It's not resolved; you don't get to a solution. Then the pilgrim road must become the aim of itself because of the values that come with it—unrest, a sense of quest and expectation. In a way, it is a trial; and in stories we see scene upon scene of trial and temptation for the protagonist. That's why many modern stories like *Ants* cannot resolve the main conflict.

In every classic novel I've read, you have a solution in one way or another. Often it is not a solution so much as it is an aesthetic ending which has a way of giving us a deceitful feeling of relief. You have it in *Ants* too, when they sit under the canopy of dust waiting for the call. Then you have that short, ironic sentence that gives us a bridge away from the ants, ". . . we were happy!"

Another technique in the modern story, one which I consider very important and one which I tried to explain in my essay, "Secular Pilgrim," has to do with development through an apparent pattern of errors. In *Ants*, we can see this. For instance, after the rabbi says to the protagonist, build a new house, change places, change luck, we really expect him to do that. He is himself a builder and we expect him to build a new house. But what does he do? Instead of building a new house he begins to fight the ants in the old house! All the while, the reader asks, what happens to the new house. And, slowly, the entire structure of the story leads us, guides us to the deeper dimensions of the story. The question lingers in the reader's mind, and so too, other questions accumulate, questions that are not entirely answered and that have no answers. A similar thing happens in Hemingway's "The Killers." If you remember, the agents of killing come to a certain place called "summit." They have come to kill a certain person. The reader is prepared for that and knows what they are going to

do. But suddenly, they begin to say to themselves, “This is a wild place. What’s the name of this place?” Then the reader begins to ask questions and one set of questions leads to another and, before you know it, the whole world of reason breaks down.

Now, when I say that the technique takes the reader into the deeper dimensions of the story, I do not mean simply that it is just a system for channeling our attention toward the secular pilgrim dimension; it is also a way of bringing us to a sudden consciousness that it is not *an* error in the world but that it is a *world* of errors. All the world is a world of error . . . with no reason . . .

TIR: But, outside of fantasy, in the real world there are conclusions. And you yourself seem to use the term “error” as if to suggest that there must be somewhere, some moral value, some “non-error.”

YO: Well, in a way, a pilgrim, a secular pilgrim, may be in a position to see the road as the end in itself. And similarly, you can say that the road becomes a shrine because of all the values implied by the road. But my strongest feeling is that we are living in a time between times. I don’t believe that the world can go on for long without a kind of new spiritual awakening. I don’t know what it will look like. I don’t know if it will be a new kind of community or if it will be a kind of new paganism, with each person having his own personal god with him in his house. I don’t know. But it will be different; it certainly will be different; and it will be. If there is no significant change, we will be destroyed. It cannot work otherwise. There is now, for example, no real basis for any values whatsoever, human values, values that may give a firm basis for our existence. If we haven’t got something that we can feel is absolute—just one thing, a little thing, a grain of dust, values can only be transitory, values of the time being. Writers know these things but generally we don’t want to know them—as I wrote in the introduction to “Secular Pilgrim”—generally for reasons of intellectual comfort.

TIR: Suppose for a moment we look back at *Ants* from the point of view of some of your readers. It is interesting that some readers think of *Ants* as a political allegory. Peter Nazareth, for example, said, “I couldn’t help relating the ants to Palestinians . . . in the sense of their being all over the place . . . and turning up organized even in the face of the attempt made to suppress and deny their existence. They keep turning up and turning up.” You answered him by saying that the Palestinians are human and we (Israelis) are human too.

YO: I was evading the answer . . . .

TIR: But, let’s pursue it. You remember Peter saying, “The others (Palestinians) are always the outsiders who come in. I couldn’t help seeing it that way.”

YO: I don’t have a definite answer but I can assume and am almost sure that the general feeling of siege was very strong when I wrote *Ants*, in about ’64 or ’65. There was, of course, terrorism. They were here, they were there—the feeling of siege was all the time working on us. There was a feeling that the Arab countries all around us were all the time plotting in the darkness how to get upon us and push us out and just finish the work the Nazis had started.

So, one can be a socialist, one can be a humanist, one can understand the Palestinians. One can even write things where the guilt complex Israelis have about the Palestinians is revealed and delineated. Many of our writers have—I did so myself. I have a short story where a soldier catches a prisoner, and infiltrator. There is doubt that he is an infiltrator with terrorist intentions . . . . But this doubt is not solved in the story. In our literature in general where the Arabs are presented as people you will always find either a glorification of the Arabs, which has its roots, of course, in a feeling of guilt, or the Arab depicted as a Satanic figure, often as a counter-image to their depiction of Israelis. Because of the feeling of seige, no Israeli writer that I know has depicted Palestinians as close friends, say, as might be possible were it not for the feeling of seige.

You must remember that we are talking of my work and of me as a writer. I myself was not in that holocaust, but my parents and my sister were killed by it. Even so, I consider myself an Israeli one hundred percent with a kind of pride and independence of thought and feeling. When it comes to the seige, the holocaust, all my race begins to well up and I begin to be suspicious, overly suspicious, a bit frightened, with a feeling of lust for revenge. These feelings are not good, I know; they lead us to a world out of proportion. And yet, what is the feeling of seige if not of something out of proportion? A claustrophobic feeling of being before something that's out of proportion.

So, it's very difficult for me to accept . . . I didn't consciously set out to make the ants Palestinians. On the other hand, maybe somewhere deep down in my subconscious that's the way it worked.

TIR: The way Peter reads it, Rachel, being very white—milk-white—an eater of honey, is the image of Israel as the land of milk and honey, an unattainable ideal. What gets in the way of the ideal is the ants. Thus, the protagonist is trying to destroy them. But, the ants are finding newer and newer ways of surviving; and as the protagonist keeps trying to destroy them, the more obsessed he becomes with them, their perfection, their beauty. Instead of the enemy remaining just an unknown enemy, they become known through the protagonist's study of them. He begins to glorify the ants until, at the end, his wife and then he himself turn into ants and wait for the building to collapse. In all this, Peter sees something of a resolution to the problem.

YO: But there is no resolution to the problem. The problem is that they are waiting for the call. The ants are only a kind of agent of some great power as in the Bible. But the deepest concern of this novella is the call, the destruction of barriers, not the cosmic end but the call. If you read again, you'll see that in the last chapters the ants themselves become, in a way, quieted down, also waiting for the call. I have resisted the reading of *Ants* as a political allegory.

TIR: What about the equally possible Third World connection? The idea of the secular pilgrim works in that context, but at the same time Third World writers who look at the colonial experience—writers like Ishmael Reed, Wilson Harris and others—are deeply concerned with surveying the past to find out what happened so as not

to repeat, not to remain isolated, but to create the “new society.” Creating this new society means that various walls must collapse. In the case of Wilson Harris, the walls of the different personalities, the different races, must collapse. They must all merge and a new society be created. But, it is not a creation from scratch; it’s looking back and forward at the same time.

YO: Yes. You call it a new society and, somehow, I cannot accept this word. I understand that for the Third World it is a matter of dressing up things in terms of society . . . new society. Also in Israel, because the Jewish people are a kind of tribal people—they have very strong tribal feelings with a kind of reciprocal, mutual responsibility and all those things. It’s one of the main features of Jewish existence. So, at some level, the Jewish people belong to the Third World, really belong in the sense that they have for centuries been idealizing a new beginning in a homeland. But in *Ants*, I didn’t feel a kind of expectation or driving toward a new society. Not a new society but a new revelation. I see it as a kind of new spiritual experience that will break all barriers. I don’t know what it will be, but I feel it less as a social thing and more as a religious thing. Maybe every family will again have its own spiritual foundation and function with an emphasis upon the home as the basic spiritual attachment. This may be because of the dialectic between human needs and political activity. As the disparity between the two gets bigger and bigger, society must somewhere break up. It is my own feeling that there is today no relevance between the political level and the basic human level. So, we must turn somewhere, break into something new.

I don’t know how to relate this to the basic feelings of the secular pilgrim. I see the secular pilgrim as a lonely man. I see him generally as middle-aged, a man in the midst of his life. Like Dante, he just awakes suddenly one day, sees a forest around and he looks for his way and asks himself, where am I going? Then, he is led through the different purgatories. This kind of awakening makes you a kind of outsider to everyone, to every society and to every people. Yet, you can be a so-called successful person. The secular pilgrim can be accepted by others but he feels within himself an inability to integrate because his energy is absorbed, is leading somewhere else. As he is depicted in modern literature, he is a lonely protagonist who is moving around in society between people, with a thirst and an unrest. It is a pilgrimage that leads nowhere, because it has no holy place. The secular pilgrim is an unresolved conflict. TIR: You have painted a fairly bleak picture of the world, of society, of politics, so much so that one may assume that you’re suggesting . . .

YO: I would just like to say it again in the way I think I meant it. There is a great disparity between the level of human needs and the level of political fulfillment. There is becoming less and less connection between the two. Now, the dialectic works in such a way that this thing must break up; so, that’s what I’m trying to say.

TIR: Knowing the ways of modern government, of politics, isn’t it rather difficult to imagine the technologically oriented societies breaking down? In modern society, the politicians, the social technicians and other interests are always about the business of

“shoring up the fragments.” They are there to “repair” so that the machinery of politics, however inefficiently, goes on no matter what.

YO: Unfortunately, yes. You know, the politicians are supposed to make history; but my feeling is that politicians are harnessing, holding back, wanting to keep their power, to keep their strength, to keep things where they are. They would rather freeze things so they won’t change or develop. Now art, in a way, is more historical in that it keeps breaking way to find new ways. That is, it creates reality.

I remember from my family, there was an aunt about whom it was said, “She wants to be another Anna Karenina.” Now, that aunt began to behave like Anna and the family was very worried that she would commit suicide. Before Dostoyevsky wrote his works full of confessions, the Russian people were only a little Dostoyevskian. But after he wrote his works, the Russian people became more Dostoyevskian. In Israel, the War of Independence, the start of independence that lasted from 1939 to 1948, was an embryonic stage of the new Hebrew literature. During this time, the literature began to glorify the young heroic type. I remember the people; I was one of them. My writing began with the younger generation, so although I was older I began writing with the post-independence-war writers. Now, there were NO heroic types at all. There were just human beings like all the other human beings with their doubts, with their self-torturings, with their feelings of guilt, their running away, and sometimes half-hero, half-deserter—you know, all of those things like all of us are! But the literature was building up a new heroic type, an Israeli hero type in which there were no doubts, no self-torture and who is normal in every way. This type began to serve as antidote to the exiled Jewish type, that is, the type with problems. The new type of hero is proud, working, devoted to his country, devoted to his leaders, and he goes where his idealism leads him and so on. Of course, there had never been such a type. But the young people began to work themselves up to these heroic dimensions and it was not easy. Some of the young people of that generation began to adapt themselves to this type. They wanted to look like these heroic types in books. So, literature can work on reality, not only the way that it may raise protest and revolutions—that’s the political way—but also on the most direct psychological level.

TIR: Where do you see your writing going in the future?

YO: I can say. I am lucky enough to have a definite idea now, and also, the instruments. My last book, *The Tomozhenna Tales*, is, in retrospect, an attempt to transport some of the vitality of the Yiddish culture and language into the Hebrew culture and language.

The Hebrew culture is a very thin culture—it doesn’t have depth because all the tradition, the richness has been acquired in different places in exile and not in Israel. While we were trying to *live* only on our Hebrew deposits of two thousand years ago, it was a bit too thin. We have to link ourselves back to the other treasures, the treasures of Jews in other places—in Eastern and Central Europe and in Northern Africa and so on. And that’s what some of us are trying to do now.

The Hebrew language is a barrier; it’s a majestic language. It doesn’t accept words, it can only *invent* them. We invent words and give them the shape of Hebrew, but

we cannot just pick up a word and assimilate it as Yiddish and English do. The English-American language is a very flexible language; it picks up words and immediately has a prefix and a suffix and it's inside, it's there. Hebrew doesn't have a prefix or a suffix. Words relate to each other like a stone to a stone. I would like to do something with the Hebrew patterns to make them more flexible.

I am working on the same type of stories as in my last book, but am trying more and more to be a bit easy-going with the Hebrew patterns. Even here and there to break some of the rules so as to make them more amenable to discovering the inner relationship with the Yiddish way, the colloquial way of expressing one's self. I can do it because, of course, I am fortunate to have had a childhood not in Israel but somewhere else. I was born in a Ukrainian town called Zinkiev. Then the family ran away from Soviet Russia to a province of Romania, which was at the time a little Jewish town called Lipcan. So, I invented a special new little town called Lipkiev which is really a fusion of Zinkiev and Lipcan. This is my little town and little country. I can do there whatever I like. So, I tell the stories that may have happened at the end of the nineteenth century—stories I may have heard told by uncles and aunts coming in and going out of the house or among themselves near the stove, telling a story they had heard here and there. They probably thought that I was fast asleep but my ears were wide open and I was swallowing those stories while “sleeping” on my sofa in the same room. Now I feel like inventing my own continent. I pick out people from everywhere. Some people fascinate me and I have a special feeling for them. So, I pick them up and plant them there in Lipkiev and I tell their stories as if they lived in Lipkiev a hundred years ago. And it works.

I would like to save the treasures of Judaism that are felt in the Yiddish language, to save them from perishing because Yiddish is dying as a live language. Although Bashevi Singer thinks otherwise and tries to say to everybody that it's not so, he is one of the last writers in Yiddish—there is no new poet or new fiction writer that I know of and I have been giving some lectures and I ask everywhere: do you know of such a person? Nobody knows. I asked in Jerusalem—some of the professors are concerned with these matters—do you know of such a person? No one knows of a young man beginning to write poetry or stories in Yiddish. That's the indicator. There is no better indicator than this, that it's going to die. So, this could be the greatest thing that we could do now—to capture some of that vitality into Hebrew and to save these wonderful treasures from dying away, from becoming just a matter of studies and (how do you call it?) investigations.

TIR: What about translation of the new literature you're creating. I mean, if you want to preserve something of this new vitality you're creating, isn't there the danger of that vitality's being diluted with translation?

YO: Yes. No doubt that much of the vitality, the colloquial aspect of Yiddish as a live language will be lost. But Hebrew is a kind of correlative of Yiddish. Yiddish has a great, a very great percentage of Hebrew words in its structure, in its feeling also. That's why it's much easier to convey the Yiddish culture, the Yiddish language, into

Hebrew than it is to capture it in some other language. That's one thing. The other thing is the Jewish experience. That experience tells about our uncles, our aunts, our fathers, our grandfathers, about things we are supposed to know first hand. A sense of tradition, I think, will make the new literature easier to absorb.

TIR: You're saying then that once the new literature is written in Yiddish/Hebrew and then read by the people, this new vitality in the blending of the languages and cultures may become a part of everyday life and expression?

YO: Yes. Yes. That would be the greatest achievement because it works that way. We were just talking about the way literature works. For instance, today you can meet people using the language from the literature. Young people who were just a couple of years ago ashamed to speak Yiddish because to speak Yiddish would mean to be like . . .

TIR: The older generation, the exiles?

YO: . . . the older generation . . . and the other Jews in exile. And there was a kind of feeling that we (the younger generation) are better, that we are stronger and so on. Now, though, things have changed. Now you can find young people in Israel who are happy to learn Yiddish songs from their grandmothers. They are happy to put into learned talk a Jewish joke, a Yiddish joke or a Yiddish proverb. That means a lot because everything begins from changing the mood, changing the national mood . . . and it changes.

TIR: Are the children being taught Yiddish in school?

YO: They have not; they are still not. But I can expect that as the universities in Israel enlarge their departments of Yiddish what will come next will be the teaching of Yiddish in the colleges, in the high schools, and then perhaps, in the elementary schools also.

TIR: I asked the previous question because, with the scope of your ambition, I wonder who your audience would be. That is to say, you want the work to live on long after it actually began to operate as a kind of generative source for other writers to follow, and, of course, for the whole Israeli culture to follow . . .

YO: Yes . . .

TIR: . . . but, who are you writing for primarily?

YO: The audience is the general reader. I have already had a very good experience with *The Tomozhenna Tales*. It was published in March '79. The first edition came out and sold for two and a half months and then the second edition came out. And, from the feedback that I have, I was surprised that people who have never had close contact with Yiddish-speaking people and Yiddish culture feel that they are interested in these tales, that somehow it brings them back to their roots.

Let me give you an example in the way of an episode from one of the stories in the book. This story is crucial to what I've been saying. The brother of a young child clutches him and directs him to the attic and says to him, "Here you have all the dreams higher than the earth." Now, this young child liked mystery and there was a world of mystery in what his brother had just said, his brother being a kind of artist.

The brother wants the young child to show him what he sees there. The young child sees only old rags, rubbish, dust, mice, old toys with torn limbs, and nothing else; and this is a great shock to the artist. But then, because he's made that way, the artist will go down and begin again to build his world as a world of mystery.

The Yiddish reader would know that the attic is not just another place between the roof and the ceiling, but that it's something that is called, in Yiddish, *boyden*. Now, *boyden* is not just a word. *Boyden* is a condition of life. *Boyden* is a history. *Boyden* is a culture. *Boyden* means this is the highest place where the Jewish dream, the Jewish aspiration, the Jewish plan can get. It cannot get higher. This is the place where it gets; and what is this place? Where all these things get broken apart. All the aspirations and all the delusions and all the great plans and great inventions—they all get to *Boyden*. Now, *boyden* has use in several expressions in Yiddish. We say, for example, "Of all his dreams, it came to a *boyden*." They came to nothing. Or, if someone would make high plans, not real, but fantastic plans—"I'll do this and I'll do that"—we say, "Just leave him there, it's just an affair with the *boyden*." *Boyden* then is an expression of many generations of Jewish experience. Now, when you tell this story and don't call it *boyden* and call it instead the attic or some equivalent word in Hebrew it will lose all its deeper implications.

Fortunately, that hasn't quite happened yet. How it hasn't, I cannot explain; but I begin to believe that we still have in Israel some of the feeling about *boyden* that we do not have when we say the technical Hebrew word for "attic." I've been surprised hearing the word from people who could not know it first hand from the Yiddish culture. But they caught the message and feel it and go with the feeling and the word. That's why I have so much hope.

TIR: So, as a writer, you have a distinct sense of recreating and bringing forward a sense of the past in order to keep a certain spirit alive?

YO: I cannot see how, in any way, you can think about the future without relating it to your past experience. It is humanly impossible. That's why I say one can live the present as a kind of animal; one can even live the present as a human being without thinking to the future or of the past, just living with no kind of enlargement. But, if you direct your mind to the future, immediately the past is captured. It's there.

TIR: Everything comes from your life experience.

YO: Of course. It's a kind of working on three pairs of eyes—one pair of eyes is of the child maturing, somewhere in the years between eight and twelve; the second pair of eyes is my pair of eyes, the eyes of a person at an age of some experience and some wisdom; and the third pair of eyes is really the pair of eyes of my mother who had a great sense of fantasy. Let me tell you. She could hear horses thumping on the hill and fading away in the distance. She could see, looking at the valley of the river, she could see it become a sea and could see the ship coming near; and she always had a longing for some mysterious person that I didn't know. I haven't figured out even today who this person was. Anyway, this longing is there, always there in the text.

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Fredrick Woodard interviewed Yitzhak Orpaz on December 11, 1979.