

Nimrod: Rebel with a Cause or Profane Idolatry?

R. Matt Berkowitz



Yitzhak Danziger (1940), 1916-1977, b. Berlin, d. Ramle

Genesis 8:10

Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on earth to be a mighty man. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; therefore it is said, 'Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.' The beginning of his kingdom was Bavel, and Erech, and Akkad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land, Asshur, he went forth . . .

Genesis Rabbah 38

You are just bandying words, and we will worship nothing but the fire. Behold, I will cast you into it, and let your God whom you adore come and save you from it!" Nimrod said. Now Haran was standing there undecided. "If Avraham is victorious, I will say that I am of Avraham's belief, while if Nimrod is victorious, I will say that I am on Nimrod's side," he thought. When Avraham descended into the fiery furnace and was saved, Nimrod asked him, "Of whose belief are you?" "Of Abraham's," he replied. Thereupon he seized him [Haran] and cast him into the fire.

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Early sketch of Nimrod, Pencil on paper, 25 x 19 cm, 1930s

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Nimrod, Yitzhak Danziger, 1939
Nubian sandstone, 95 x 33 x 33 cm

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Micah Joseph Berdichevski, 1865-1921(Russia), *Wrecking and Building* (1903)

Our hearts, ardent for life, sense that the resurrection of Israel depends on a revolution—the Jews come first, before Judaism—the living man, before the legacy of his ancestors . . . We must cease to be tablets on which books are transcribed and thoughts handed down to us—always handed down. Through a basic revision of the very foundations of Israel’s inner and outer life, our whole consciousness, our predispositions, thoughts, feelings, desires, and will and aim will be transformed: and we shall live and stand fast . . . We are the last Jews—or we are the first of a new nation.

Yitzhak Danziger in an interview with Ben Ami Scharfstein

I wanted to create an emotional and material whole, made up of hunter, falcon, scenery, sandstone, Petra and the Nabateans – an encounter of heroic myth with place, with people, and with the sandy desert stone, I, like the Nabateans, was carving myself into my surroundings.

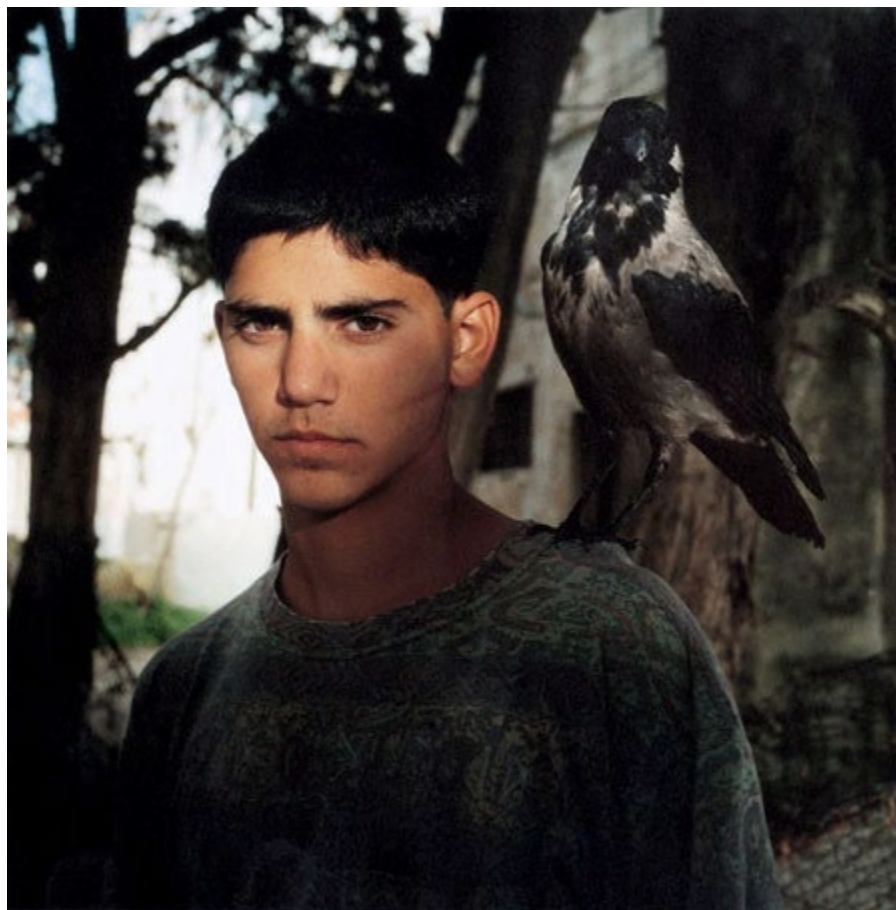
Reflection Question

Consider the classical Zionist critique of Jewish tradition, as articulated by Berdichevski, that Jews are passive and history happens to them. In your view, did we distort the essence of Judaism during our time in exile from our Homeland?

Zionist Challenge

If you were to create a modern Nimrod that represented the Zionist ethos of today, what elements would you include? What materials would you use? Jerusalem stone? Mosaic glass pieces? Halvah?

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Untitled, Adi Nes, 2000 (Chromogenic print, 100 x 100 cm)