

THE WEXNER FOUNDATION

Igael Tumarkin: Revising the 'New Jew'

R. Matt Berkowitz



Igael Tumarkin (1933-2021), b. Dresden, d. Israel

THE WEXNER FOUNDATION

Anita Shapira, Israel: A History

Deep, almost palpable anxiety gripped the people of Israel. Hundreds of thousands of them had either experienced the Holocaust or lost their families in it. The Eichmann trial a few years before had deepened awareness of the Holocaust in all Israelis, and with it the fear of annihilation. Rumors predicted tens of thousands dead in the approaching conflict, and the terror of air raids on population centers increased the sense of helplessness and fear.

Rav Zvi Yehudah Kook, May 14, 1967, address to students at Merkaz HaRav, Jerusalem

The whole nation flowed into the streets to celebrate in its feelings of joy. But I couldn't go out and join in rejoicing. I sat alone, and burdened. In those first hours, I couldn't make my peace with what had happened, with the terrible news that the word of God in the book of Prophets had now been fulfilled: They divided My Land! Where is our Hebron? Have we forgotten it? And where is Shechem? Have we forgotten it? And where is Jericho? Have we forgotten it? And where is the other bank of the Jordan River? Where is every clod of earth? Every piece of God's land? Do we have the right to cede even a centimeter of it? God forbid! . . . In that state, my whole body was stunned, wounded and severed into pieces. I couldn't celebrate. 'They divided my land!' They divided the land of God! . . . I couldn't go outside to dance and rejoice. That is how the situation was nineteen years ago.

THE WEXNER FOUNDATION



Panic over Trousers, 1961
Mixed Media on Canvas



Rex, 1964
Mixed Media on Canvas

THE WEXNER FOUNDATION



He Walked Through the Fields, 1967
Painted Bronze



Portrait of the Young Artist as Philoctetes, 1965-1966
Bronze

THE WEXNER FOUNDATION

Amos Oz, *Censored Voices*

The sense of relief was understandable, and I shared it. We thought we were facing annihilation. We were still under the shadow of the 1948 War of Independence, and many of us remembered living through it as children. We remembered siege, hunger, shelling, living in shelters, numerous casualties, terrible losses, prolonged suffering. No one thought this war would be so short. People were shocked when it ended after six days. It's no wonder that a whole nation became euphoric – especially one that for thousands of years experienced force only as inflicted on its whipped backs. It's probably natural that a people such as this gets a bit drunk with its physical prowess. But my friends and I saw the other side of the coin as well.

Avinoam, Israeli soldier who fought in '67, in interview with Shlomit Teub, *The Seventh Day*

I think one of the things that characterizes us is the tragedy of being victors. We're simply not used to it. It's got something to do with our education. Look, I saw the Mitla Pass and it made a deep impression on me. At first glance you could say perhaps, 'Look, just see how the Jews smashed the Arabs. We went to war, they wanted to wipe us out, and just look, how marvelous . . .' You mustn't show it to Israelis because all of our education is oriented towards building, and it has been ever since the pioneers came here. Everything's been geared to construction. And here, there's destruction. A classic example of destruction.

Reflection Question

Igael Tumarin's work is both evocative and provocative. Clearly, his art was avant-garde and counter-cultural in his day, and he sought to express a sharp critique of the culture of militarism and bravado. In the aftermath of the '67 conflict, and the celebratory victory over the Arabs, how do you imagine you might have experienced Tumarin's work: does it feel like insightful commentary, are you resentful, is it beyond the pale, or...?

Zionist Challenge

In many ways, Tumarin & *The Seventh Day* are an interesting parallel to *Breaking the Silence*, an organization that compiles testimony of soldiers serving in the occupied territories (Judea and Samaria) in our own day. Do you believe there should be artistic and literary limits to critiquing Israel both in the country and in the Diaspora? In any case, how do you imagine nurturing a healthier expression of differing views?