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Motifs of the transmigration of souls and dybbuk in Jewish culture and their contemporary implementation in the works by Yona Wollach

In Jewish culture, both in the religious tradition and in the sphere of rituals, the question of the soul and spirit plays a very important role. In Jewish mysticism the most important concepts related to the spirit are the dybbuk and the transmigration of souls. In this article first I would like to present these two terms and then show the artistic reference to them in the works of the contemporary Israeli poet Yona Wollach¹.

The concepts of dybbuk and metempsychosis in Jewish culture

The term of dybbuk (Heb. dibuk – adhere, cling) describes the phenomenon of seizure of a living person's body, who already has his or her own soul, by the spirit of the previously deceased person who knows no peace (Borzymińska & Żebrowski, 2003, p. 354). Thus in the body of a person occupied by the dybbuk there are two souls, and each of them has its own biog-

¹ The transcription of Hebrew words in this article is based on the simplified system of notation of Hebrew signs using the Latin alphabet which allows an English reader to pronounce them in the manner most similar to the contemporary Hebrew language in Israel. Proper names in the transcription are started with capital letters. The Hebrew names in literature, various studies and therefore in this article may be written differently depending on transcription despite making due efforts.

raphy. According to the Jewish beliefs the souls that enter other bodies are usually those who – because of a vast amount of sins – attempt to purify themselves in the bodies of living people. Sometimes the soul of a prematurely deceased person could continue and finish life in the body of another person. It is worth mentioning that the term dybbuk was associated with a sin in two ways: on the one hand, the sinful souls of the dead seek refuge in the bodies of living people and, on the other hand, the presence of a foreign spirit is the manifestation of a sin committed by the carriers themselves (Madeyska-Pilchowa, 1988, p. 140).

The dybbuk controls a part of the human personality, speaks through the mouth of the victim with the voice which is not natural for this victim. The strange spirit can be driven out from the carrier using exorcisms. But earlier the spirit should be persuaded to disclose their identity and a restitution (restoration of unity) should be carried out so as to prevent the spirit from occupying another person (Unterman, 1994, p. 77). Although the term dybbuk appeared for the first time only about 1680 in the text written in Yiddish in Volhynia, the same phenomenon, described with other names, had been already known in the Middle Ages (Scholem, 2010, pp. 261–264). The notion gradually captured the folk imagination and in the 18th century it became the common idea, as well as the subject of legends and literary texts. The most known work of Jewish literature, in which the motif of dybbuk was used, is the drama of S. An-sky *The Dybbuk or Between Two Worlds* to which I will return later in the article.

The other fundamental concept of Jewish mysticism, apart from the dybbuk, is the transmigration of souls (Heb. *gilgul neshamot* – rotation of souls). This concept of a new, posthumous entering of the soul in another physical shape (human being, animal or inanimate object) appeared initially in the current of Judaism called Karaism, but it achieved its complete form in Kabbalah (Unterman, 1994, pp. 294–295). Reincarnation is described in one of the most important books of Jewish mysticism *Sefer HaBahir* (Book of the Brightness). When Isaac Luria elaborated on the doctrine of metempsychosis in the 16th century, its scope became so popular that mystics started to notice the elements of biblical and Talmudic souls one in another (Madeyska-Pilchowa, 1988, p. 143). In accordance with Lurianic Kabbalah each full soul – like a body – consists of many mystical elements. Individual parts of a soul, namely sparks, can enter bodies. In the last resort, the transmigration of sparks can act as the reconstruction of the full form of a soul (Borzymińska & Żebrowski, 2003, p. 480).

Further incarnations of a soul during the transmigration generally allow it to purify and gradually improve (Ochman, 1997, pp. 246–249). A soul appears again in the world so

as to do penance for its committed sins. Repeat descents of the souls of the righteous may take place also for the good of the world to provide assistance to others. Multiple incarnations are more common in the event of particularly difficult missions and may take many generations. Good deeds lead to a rebirth in a human form, and misdeeds condemn souls to reside in animals or objects. Thus the soul of the dead returns to the earthly world and lives in a new body – usually of a newborn baby (Scholem, 2010, pp. 269–284). In the body of the child only one soul lives, but it can have several biographies, because it may happen that previous biographies are not completely erased from the soul. Some souls, unable to find a new body to reside in, become dybbuks (Scholem, 1996, pp. 127–129). In An-sky's drama mentioned earlier, the common faith in the transmigration of souls is clearly visible. One of the characters – Meshulah (also called the Messenger or Old Wanderer) – explains the events taking place in the small town in the following way: "When the soul of a person who has not yet died is destined to enter the body of a person who has not yet been born, a struggle takes place. If the sick person dies, the child will come into the world alive. If the sick person recovers, the child will be born dead" (Ansky, 2002, p. 11).

The concept of the transmigration of souls and the dybbuk played an important role for centuries, not only in Jewish mysticism, but also in folklore as well as in popular and highbrow culture, becoming the themes of many artistic works (cf. Nigal, 1994; Neugroschel, 2000; Legutko, 2010; Elijor, Bilu, Zakovitch, & Shinan, 2013). In the further part of this study I would like to show how Yona Wollach – a poet and an outstanding personality in the history of Hebrew literature – referred to the mentioned concepts in her works. After presentation of Wollach's profile, I will move to the analysis of the fragments of some of her works, in which the artist describes the mental states similar to the seizure by a dybbuk and the transmigration of souls. I will also suggest the interpretation of her life and work based on the social context of these alternative states of consciousness.

Yona Wollach – a scandalmonger and a mystic

Yona Wollach was born on 10 June 1944 in the town of Petah Tikva in the territory of the British Mandate of Palestine at that time (Sarna, 1993). She grew up in the village of Ono next to Tel Aviv (now Kiryat Ono). Her father was one of the founders of the settlement, he died at the First Arab-Israeli War when the future poet was only 4. Initially Wollach was a very diligent schoolgirl, but when she began to study at secondary school she focused

exclusively on creating poetry and painting. Both in her youthful years and in her adult life she was perceived as an agent provocateur and a rebel due to her flamboyant appearance and immodest behaviour. She was expelled from school and only thanks to her mother's pressure she continued her education at night school. At the age of 17 she started to study in the Institute of Drawing and Sculpture in Tel Aviv. It is when she met Tel Aviv's artistic world and became a part of it. She made friends with Meir Wieseltier and Yair Hurvitz, the most known Hebrew poets of that period. She did not work, provided for by her mother. Wollach led a busy social and sexual life, maintained close relationships with both men and women. She was breaking the successive boundaries of social conventions and cultural norms. She took several suicide attempts, first – when she was a teenage girl, after her love relationship ended. At the age of 21 she voluntarily reported on the treatment to the psychiatric hospital where she underwent the LSD therapy, popular at that time. Then she was in hospital again several times, also against her will. She would say that her emotional state was rather a burden for her than a source of inspiration.

The first texts of Wollach were published in 1964 in the magazine "Ahshav" [Now], and the first volume *Devarim* [Things] appeared two years later (Granot, 2009, p. 397). The works of the poet played a role that cannot be overestimated in the revolution in Hebrew poetry of the 1960s of the 20th century. Wollach was one of the founders of the magazine "Pshita" [Simplification], which aimed at making the poetic language similar to the colloquial speech. The artist wrote freely, she was not limited by traditional poetic structures or linguistic norms. She became the symbol of the feminist revolution in Hebrew poetry. Presenting the provocative feminine figure that emanated sexuality, she became a stylistic model for many later writers. Many of her poems entered both to the canon of Hebrew literature and to popular culture. These texts to which melodies were composed were sung by the most famous stars of the Israeli song. On the basis of her poems the performance *Batzir tov* [Great Harvest] was created in the 1970s. At the end of her life Wollach returned to the family Ono so as to look after her ill mother, although their relationship was sometimes very difficult. The artist herself was also ill – he had breast cancer. She died on 29 September 1985 in Tel Aviv.

Yona Wollach as a private person and as an artist was profoundly interested in every mystical theories, including Jewish Kabbalah. The biographer of the poet, Igal Sarna (1993, p. 186), cites several episodes from her life that indicate a predilection for kabbalistic concepts. The artist read the books of one of the most famous Hasidic leaders, rabbi Nachman of Breslov. When she was told that in his youth rabbi Nachman suffered from strong

hallucination, aural delusions, paralysing fear of death and changeable mood, she felt that his person became close to her. Some other time one of the artist's friend, working at the National Library and studying the kabbalistic texts, showed her several interesting titles in this area (Sarna, 1993, p. 151). After Wollach had left he noted that the books had disappeared from the shelves. The poet not only enjoyed reading mystical writings, but she was convinced that she herself was a mystic and a medium through which – in the form of her works – the powers of the world could speak. In the film by Yair Qedar (2014) *Shiv'at ha-selilim shel Yona Wollach. Otobiographia dokumentarit* [Seven tapes of Yona Wollach. Documentary autobiography] the poet spoke about creating one of her poems as follows: "I wrote it completely without awareness. I was a medium in the whole story. These are feelings, this is knowledge. This is not a rational thing. I am writing about mysticism. I am a mystic. I am a medium. I am taking over the powers of the world". Similar terms can be found in one of her works:

I don't feel
how I write
it's like fainting
I have no flesh
and I have no bones
and I have nothing
and just this alone as if I were the poorest
and the richest

(Wallach, 2006, p. 168)

In the same interview the poet also talked about her mystical relationship with God: "I heard him [God – AP] and felt him from my childhood. And I loved him very much. I was really in love with him, he was the love of my life. Since I was a girl, he has been calling me. And during all these years there was a voice in my dreams that was calling me: Yona, Yona, Yona" (Qedar, 2014).

But Wollach talked about this mystical meeting in terms of the great burden and psychological stigma. Her religious beliefs were what constituted a barrier to establish close relations with other Israeli artists of that period (Mark, 2009, p. 249). Both the poet's environment and the readers initially with scepticism and often with large indignation responded to her declarations of deep faith and descriptions of experienced revelations. This was due to the provocative and often even iconoclastic nature of many of her texts. Because in her private life as well as in her texts Wollach aimed at violating any borders,

starting from linguistic and aesthetic norms, up to social, genre, class, and racial norms (Kubovy, 1993), the principles of political correctness to the rules connected with the separation of the spheres of the sacred and the profane, in particular in the areas of sex and religion (Mazor, 1996). Religiousness of Wollach was therefore very far from the widely adopted image of piety in Judaism. Moreover, her vision of God was not linked to any specific religion. In the already mentioned interview Wollach described her perception of divinity in the following manner: "God is inside us. We can split ourselves into several parts, find God inside us and work with it. This is the religious discipline" (Jeshurun, 1984, pp. 113–114).

As I have stressed previously, mysticism played a major role both in personal life of the poet and in her work. This mystical religious experience was for her very precious because it was characterised by reality, truthfulness of sensual experience of meeting with divinity that ceased to be an abstract concept (Mark, 2009, pp. 249–251). Mysticism was called by Wollach "the top of poetry, the top of life, the desire for creation, everything" (Jeshurun, 1984, p. 116). Therefore the mystical concepts of dybbuk and metempsychosis were also close to her. The artist Asher Reich cites the testimony in accordance with which Wollach perceived herself as another incarnation of the Hebrew poet Rachel: "When I lived as Rachel, I was full of fears and I decided to be nice and pleasant to people, but now, when I returned to life for a while, I intend to write about everything" (Reich, 1993, p. 46). Wollach, in her customary manner that was kept secret before her closest friends, repeatedly visited the grave of Rachel at the Sea of Galilee (Rattok, 1997, pp. 13–14).

Alternative states of consciousness in the works of Wollach

The literary critic Lily Rattok (Rattok, 1997, p. 9) indicated that the issues which dominated in Yona Wollach's poetry included states of consciousness, emotionality, and identity. The poet Aharon Shabtai (2006, pp. XII–XIII) added that without the concept of consciousness and ego we could not understand either the artist or her works. Shabtai believed that the greatest achievement of Wollach had been the introduction of the language related to the ego itself to the Hebrew poetry – the ego which is split, multiple, without sharp borders, about which she wrote in one of the poems:

My consciousness melting away
like memorial candles on Yom Kippur²
(Wallach, 2006, p. 47)

The issues of consciousness and identity are related to the concepts of reincarnation and seizure by dybbuk discussed in the first part of the article. For example, in the work *Second time, second chance* the characteristic of both these concepts can be identified.

These are not my feelings
I tell you these are not my feelings
These are feelings of someone else
These are not feelings from before my life
These are not feelings of my souls incarnated again
[...]
Someone is passing through my life now
Putting the heels after my heels
Leaving traces in my life
Something scent taste experience feeling
This is not my life
But I know it this is my life
Someone is passing through my life like along a wide alley
I feel him this is not my feeling

(Wollach, 1992, p. 212³)

The title of the poem, *Second time, second chance*, raises the association with the transmigration of souls, the reincarnation of the soul in the body, and the return to the earthly world. Yet the lyrical subject of the poem emphasises: "These are not feelings from before my life/ These are not feelings of my souls incarnated again". Apparently the subject takes the possibility of metempsychosis into consideration, but not in this case (Mark, 2009, pp. 253–254). For the problem here is about the "feelings of someone else" experienced inside you, about a realistic, disturbing presence of another spirit in your body, about strange feelings coming from your soul. It can be assumed that the poet with deliberation does not use psychological terms such as multiple personality disorders, dissociative identity disorders or psychosis. She decides to present this state, felt as the presence of something or someone else in your own inside, as a multitude of souls in one body by using the category

² In the Code of Jewish Law *Shulhan Aruh* by Joseph Karo there is a note of the custom of illuminating candles in the synagogue so as to commemorate the deceased parents in the most important Jewish holiday of penitential nature, Yom Kippur.

³ The translation of the poem is done by Joanna Modzelewska-Jankowiak.

of dybbuk and not the category of mental disorders. She chooses the language of metaphysics and mysticism, and not the language of medicine. Taking into account the fact that Wallach herself was repeatedly hospitalised in psychiatric health centres, her artistic selection takes a particular significance and becomes an appeal for other understandings of a human soul, alternative to those of medical or psychological character.

Descriptions of unusual experiences such as the existence of a soul outside the body, reincarnation of a spirit in the body, a strange voice letting out of the body, can also be found in another text of the poet – *To live at the speed of the biography*.

a person emerges from a placenta and begins to deal with witchcraft
he separates from it now from the biography
tries to function now without his life from outside
outside himself now he sits in the field and prays
sits in the field like a spirit outside himself outside his body
he'll yet enter his body will identify

[...]

he's outside his body his body appears vulnerable
he looks at himself like a stranger maybe an acquaintance
a moment passed another moment passed, already? He remembered
another voice spoke from his throat not his another's
he spoke with the voice of someone else for some time

[...]

again accepted himself this time he'll be careful not rush
he'll live at the speed of the biography will guard

[...]

he'll speak only with his voice always be himself
won't accuse won't judge will love strong and yet
be free as he was born he's remembers
others were killed inside themselves at an earlier age
not him he remembers the moment of dying
he remembers the moment of resurrection and precise moments
he'll do his best under the given conditions

[...]

without me my life is impossible he said to himself
and after all everything a person desired, his life.

(Wallach, 2006, pp. 128–129)

In these parts of the work, like in the discussed mystical concepts, the author seems to make a distinction between a biography as a history of life from life itself, from a living

creature: "he separates from it now from the biography". The lyrical subject initially distances himself from the current shape of his life, and his ego goes beyond his body. This body seems to be hurt, you can understand that once he was in a hurry overmuch and did not care for the body. He also happened to speak with "different voice", inauthentic, not coming out from the inside and caused by the needs of the body. But when he gets a chance to reunite, he promises himself "to be himself", "to identify himself". In the description of the internal process of division and unification, as well as the reflection on the authenticity of his own existence, there are phenomena triggering associations with a dybbuk (incarnation of the soul in the body, speaking with the voice of another person) and reincarnation (death and return to life).

In Wallach's works the motif of leaving the body appears very frequently. For example, in the poem of significant title *Outside the body* the poet describes abandoning the suffering organism.

The hypnotist was here
she spoke of the body tired from all the years
serving and doing things for us
and I went out from the body
and sat on the edge of the bed
looked at it

(Wallach, 2006, p. 157)

The theme of speaking with a strange voice also quite frequently runs through the texts of the poet, in particular in the form of a song let out from the bird's throat, like in the poems *Identity problems* and *Bird*.

Bird what are you singing
someone else
sings from your throat
(Wallach, 2006, p. 101)

One bird sang
but not her song
another bird sang from her throat
sang a different song
the bird didn't recognize didn't know it was a different song
someone else speaking from her throat
she always thought it was she

(Wallach, 2006, p. 137)

In Qedar's film (2014) Wollach says: "Each of us lives other people's lives a thousand times a day. They speak through our throats. Who of us lives their own life? Who of us?". The poet identifies authentic life with speaking our own voice. This is why the hero of the poem *To live at the speed of the biography* undertakes to "speak only with his voice always be himself". Therefore this work seems to raise also the issue of freedom and control over our own lives, including the right to decide on our own lives against "other voices" – social norms or moral authorities.

The clearest reference to the theme of dybbuk can be seen in the poem *Now Lealeh is scared*, the title of which refers the readers directly to the already mentioned An-sky's drama *The Dybbuk* or *Between Two Worlds*.

Now Lealeh is scared
she's just that age –
the spirits that extend a hand
from the grave and attract
a live person pull her,
Lealeh is seventeen
all the fears speak
her young heart that knows
anything can be
[...]
and tells a story
about the things
that can happen within our power
without our knowledge
[...]
and I with her am afraid
reviving ancient spirits
and old fears from the hideout
and again for everything there's no reason
and the world isn't concentrated around me
I am outside knocking knocking
and anything can suddenly happen.

(Wallach, 2006, p. 161)

So as to fully understanding the poem of Wollach it is necessary to summarise shortly the storyline of *The Dybbuk*. Two Jews – Sender and Nissen – many years before made an oath to each other that if one of them would have a daughter and the other a son in the future, their children would get married. But after years Sender decides to

find for his daughter Leah a better candidate than the poor son of Nissen – Khonon. Khonon, initially an above-average student of yeshiva, finally devotes himself to Khabalah studies, regarded as mysterious and dangerous. It is said in the community that the boy who was in love with Leah was paralysed and killed in the synagogue. On the day of her wedding with the candidate Menashe chosen by her father, Leah goes to the cemetery so as to invite her mother to the wedding. After she returns, just before the wedding ceremony, the spirit of her beloved Khonon enters her body in the form of a dybbuk. Exactly this scene is reflected in the fragment of the poem when: "the spirits that extend a hand/ from the grave and attract/ a live person pull her". In An-sky's play Leah says: "If you leave the bride alone before the wedding evil spirits come and take her away... (...) We are not surrounded by evil spirits but by the souls of people who have died before their time" (Ansky, 2002, p. 24). And Meshulah corrects the girl: "The souls of the dead do return to the world, but not as disembodied spirits. There are souls which must go through several incarnations before they are finally purified (...). And then there are souls who enter the body of a newborn child and purify themselves through their own deeds" (Ansky, 2002, p. 26).

Leah, both in the drama and in the poem of Wollach, is a particularly sensitive person who can see more and whose "young heart that knows/ anything can be". In the work of An-sky the girl is convinced that "If one concentrates very hard, it is possible to see them [the souls of the deceased – AP] and hear their voices and even know their thoughts. I know"⁴ (Ansky, 2002, p. 25).

The lyrical subject of the poem describes the fear experienced by the young girl and identifies with her: "and I with her am afraid". The subject also feels the fear of "ancient spirits", of something that may appear in the soul. But Leah's attitude causes that the lyrical subject notices that "anything can happen". The brave girl who protests against the 19th century social norms, the father's and rabbi's wills, who does not accept the loss of freedom and love, became the inspiration for Wollach. The poet was interested in not only the rebel, the protest, but also in crossing the borders of life and death, which seem to be obvious. Both Leah and Wollach are convinced of their different state of mind and that the voices of other people speak through them. The work's title – *Now Leah is scared* – indicates that this history still remains current, takes place here and now. Such presentation of the mental

⁴ S. Ansky, *The Dybbuk and Other Writings*, p. 25

state, not as a disorder, but a particular sensitivity, shows the alternative view of Wollach on the issues of human psyche.

The dybbuk as escaping from oppressive social norms

The Israeli researcher of Jewish mysticism, Rachel Elijor (2014, pp. 57–59) proposes an interesting interpretation of the phenomenon of dybbuk – as a way to avoid submission to the norms dictated by the patriarchal order of traditional Jewish communities (inter alia, the custom of arranged marriages). Uncontrolled behaviours, different states of consciousness or a disease, on one hand being a response to the suffered violence and repression, and, on the other hand, being often the only way to express your own identity, were explained traditionally in terms of the interference of external powers: evil spirit, demon, dybbuk. The victim of a dybbuk, losing control of mind and body, was excused from obeying the rules of the authoritarian social system. Balancing between seemingly binary categories of life and death or masculinity and femininity, aroused fear in the community which sought the healing of a demoniac and thus the restoration of the prior order.

Elijor (2010, pp. 443–444) sees the discussed phenomenon in a broad historical and social contexts, and convinces that the madness was often an asylum for those who did not accept the common norms in the particular place and time. Many creative women suffered from physical or mental disorders, which to some extent enabled them to withdraw from the community and to arrange space where they created their own rules. Among the artists that had such experience (the dissent from social norms expressed by behaviours considered insane) the researcher mentions Yona Wollach herself – in addition to Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath.

Wollach, as it has been previously said, with her life and poetry rebelled against the contemporary patriarchal and puritan Israeli mentality. Her uncompromising approach to her works where she placed emphasis on authenticity of experience, was described by Shabtai as "total writing" (2006, p. XVII). Struggling with her attacks of frenzy and fear, delusions, hallucinations, insomnia, and finally her stays in psychiatric hospitals, the poet described as "a necessary night, without which it would be impossible to reach hidden, internal light" (Shabtai, 2006, p. XX).

Returning to the way of explanation of the phenomenon of seizure by dybbuk presented by Rachel Elijor, I would like to propose the interpretation of the life and works of

Yona Wallach as a response to the oppressive cultural and religious norms, and an imperative to categorise all the objects and phenomena of the social world. Alternative states of consciousness, experienced by the poet and described by her in her works, can therefore be construed as an escape from limiting frames and expectations. Hence the frequent presence of a dybbuk – a figure questioning the binary order – in the works of the artists (Seidman, 2003, p. 236). An image of madness, interpreted by the community as an activity of dark external forces and a reaction to restrictive, patriarchal norms, can be found among others in the text *Cornelia*.

In the middle of the night the demon⁵
appeared and told Cornelia
this is the time and Cornelia
who lacks initiative and she must
Cornelia and the demon went walking
in the middle of the night to pick nettles
the demon got tired and quit
Cornelia has a nettle rash and she picked
really you might have thought
Cornelia was a red she-demon
in the morning the people did it to her
because they thought Cornelia was a red she-demon
and Cornelia didn't know
she always thought they do it to her
because she is Cornelia.

(Wallach, 2006, p. 4)

At the narrative level, the beginning of the poem brings an image of a demon, which appears in the title character of the poem and enters her body at night to pick up nettles – medicinal and poisonous plants simultaneously. At first the heroine probably does not want to do it and it is not her idea (she "lacks initiative and she must"), but gradually she becomes more active and later, even by herself, she is picking up nettles, although the demon "got tired and quit". This nocturnal expedition results in Cornelia's "nettle rash" which can be understood as both a morbid rash and a full bloom, prime. This particular appearance causes that people take her for "a red she-demon" and they treat her in such a manner: "they do it to her". The word "always" suggests that these are not one-off actions,

⁵ I have changed one word in the translation by Linda Stern Zisquit. Instead of the word 'devil' I have used the word 'demon' as the equivalent of the Hebrew term 'שד'. [note added by AP]

but repeated practices. However, it is not clear what the people around her exactly "do" to Cornelia. In Hebrew this verb has got erotic connotations and if we follow this meaning, the people would abuse Cornelia sexually (Tzmir, 2006, p. 243). But if we lean towards the social meanings, they could "do" her court, harm or shame. Regardless of the interpretation chosen it appears that the very heroine is apparently not aware of either the reason for which the people around her treat her this way or the very opinion.

In turn, the story of the heroine at the metaphorical level can be read in the category of the parable of the woman as a victim of socio-sexual oppression. Then Cornelia would symbolise a woman obedient to the rules of patriarchal culture, which forbids her to admit that she feels sexual attraction. But when she is tempted and goes "to pick nettles" in the middle of the night – namely she does a sexual intercourse – she discovers the source of pleasure in it and entirely devotes herself to it. This love affair, on one hand, makes Cornelia "blossom", but on the other hand – her new state, her discovery of sexuality is also visible to other people for whom she becomes "a red she-demon". So when the heroine is relieved from the burden of double morality, she at the same time discovers that she has to pay dearly for her freedom. She is considered as possessed by evil spirit because such social interpretation explains her opposition to the norms binding in the community.

The psychological and social aspects of the poetry of Yona Wollach

In many of her poems, also in those presented in this article, Yona Wollach tried to discover and express the unknown, the unclear, the multiple. One of the tools that she used in these artistic struggle, was the mystical system of explanations of how the world and a person function. One of its major sources was Kabbalah. The artist understood human psyche as complex and indefinable, thus she avoided psychological theories or medical diagnoses, and gladly used less tangible and wider mystical concepts, inter alia the concepts of the transmigration of souls and the seizure by a dybbuk. The conditions described by her – between life and death, the real world and dreaming, sanity and madness – are in line with the broader trend of the poet, who wanted to fight with socially imposed standards, patterns and restrictions and to speak with her own and not "a strange voice".

The work *And I being myself*, in which the poet places the reflection on the mystical experiences and the complexity of the ego in the context of everyday realities, may serve as a good summary of the above deliberations.

Everything is within the framework of reality
I told her
everything within the safe recognizable borders
of our basic realities
that's what complicates the whole thing
and that's its magic
there's nothing outside of life
here and now.
"And the immortality of the soul"
she asked
and I told her
none, that's it, that's the point
everything is here and now
here is the immortality of the soul
and here are the incarnations and the identity
and I being myself
and he himself.

(Wallach, 2006, p. 169)

Translated by Joanna Modzelewska-Jankowiak

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Motifs of the transmigration of souls and dybbuk in Jewish culture and their contemporary implementation in the works by Yona Wollach

Abstract

This article describes two concepts important for Jewish mysticism – the dybbuk and the transmigration of souls, and goes on to present their contemporary usage in the works by Yona Wollach. The concept of the transmigration of souls (in Hebrew: *gilgul neshamot*) describes a situation where the soul of a dead person returns to this world and occupies a new body. In the case of the dybbuk (in Hebrew: *dibuk*), on the other hand, the body of a living person, who has his or her own soul, is possessed by the spirit of a dead person. The concepts of reincarnation and dybbuk played an important role not only in religious tradition but also in folklore and popular and high culture. They both became the focus of a number of artworks. The article presents fragments of the poems of the Israeli poet Yona Wollach (1944–1985), in which she describes psychological states similar to the transmigration of souls and being captured by a dybbuk. The article aims to show that these poetic images are in close connection with Wollach's concept of the human psyche.

Keywords:

dybbuk, reincarnation, Judaism, Yona Wollach, Hebrew poetry

Motywy wędrówki dusz i dybuka w kulturze żydowskiej i ich współczesna realizacja w twórczości Jony Wolach

Abstrakt

Artykuł przybliży dwa ważne pojęcia mistyki żydowskiej – dybuka i wędrówki dusz, a następnie ukazuje współczesne nawiązanie do nich w twórczości Jony Wolach. Pod pojęciem wędrówki dusz (hebr. *gilgul neszamot*) rozumie się sytuację, w której dusza zmarłego wraca do świata doczesnego i zamieszkuje w nowym ciele. Natomiast w przypadku dybuka (hebr. *dibuk*) dochodzi do zawładnięcia ciałem żywego człowieka, posiadającego już jedną duszę, przez ducha zmarłej wcześniej osoby. Pojęcia wędrówki dusz i dybuka odgrywały istotną rolę nie tylko w tradycji religijnej, ale i w folklorze oraz kulturze popularnej i wysokiej, stając się tematem wielu dzieł artystycznych. W tekście prezentowane są fragmenty wierszy izraelskiej poetki Jony Wolach (1944–1985), w których opisuje ona stany psychiczne zbliżone do wędrówki dusz i zawładnięcia przez dybuka. Artykuł ma na celu ukazanie, że te poetyckie obrazy pozostają w głębokim związku z podzielaną przez Wolach koncepcją ludzkiej psychiki.

Słowa kluczowe:

dybuk; reinkarnacja; judaizm; Jona Wolach; poezja hebrajska