**Judas Iscariot: Between Traitor and Betrayed. On Igal Mossinsohn’s Novel, *Judas***

*We need the messiah so that he may not come. Because the days of the messiah are more important than the messiah himself, and the Jewish people lives in the days of the messiah, expects the days of the messiah, believes in the days of the messiah, and that is one of the main reasons for the existence of the Jewish people.*

—David Ben Gurion. Meeting with Israeli writers, October 11, 1949, 23, BGA, Protocols.

In his short story, *Three Versions of Judas* (1944), Argentinian novelist Jorge Luis Borges describes the research conducted by Nils Ruenberg, a fictional Swedish theologian and member of the National Evangelical Union, who solved the riddle of Judas Iscariot.[[1]](#footnote-1) Borges’s story presents a variation on the New Testament’s notorious betrayal narrative and crowns Judas Iscariot the true Evangelical tragic hero. Judas Iscariot, who is perceived in Christian tradition as epitomizing evil, envy, selfishness, and greed, is presented in Ruenberg’s writings as someone whose total faith in Jesus differentiated him from the other apostles and made him humanity’s true savior.[[2]](#footnote-2) Through a narrative gesture that leads to a fundamental blurring of the dichotic relationship between betrayal and loyalty, Borges’s story demonstrates the often-betraying role of literary fiction itself, as it challenges readers’ extant systems of knowledge and meaning and undermines what has already been fixed as an indisputably canonical narrative.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In this paper I aim to explore the role of betrayer (and betrayal) as a literary, political, and critical position in Israeli author Igal Mossinsohn’s novel *Judas* (1962).[[4]](#footnote-4) Mossinsohn situates Judas Iscariot at the heart of the Jewish national project, and presents him not as a betrayer, but rather as an obedient man ordered by his commander to turn Jesus in as a means to change the balance of political power in occupied Canaan. The presentation of the Christian betrayal narrative in the framework of a plot revolving around political intrigue associated with the aspiration for autonomous Jewish sovereignty enables me to read Mossinsohn’s novel as an intellectual and critical arena. This reading focuses on an exploration of the meaning and ramifications of betrayal against the context of the relevant political and ideological trends in the Israeli reality in which it was written.

Mossinsohn’s novel fosters an unresolvable tension between the desire to present an active and effective model of political betrayal and its failure—the failure to burrow an escape route out of what I will refer to as “the Israeli industry of saints.” This “industry” renders betrayal an inherent part of a prescribed drama of a Zionist redemption narrative. In the novel, the failure of betrayal is rooted in the fact that it does not have a world-changing effect and does not constitute a point of departure for the imagining of alternative forms of political and social relations. Therefore, what may seem in Mossinsohn’s novel to be a necessary position of betrayal, which harshly criticizes the political underpinnings of Israeli sovereignty, is eventually replaced by a—less treacherous—impasse into which the betrayer is sucked against his will.

**The Author as Betrayer and Literature as Betrayal**

The figure of Judas Iscariot, who leaves public life and is exiled from his homeland after being accused of betrayal, could be considered Igal Mossinsohn’s (1917-1994) literary double. From his very first steps as an author, Mossinsohn saw himself as holding an oppositional position against the Zionist establishment and dominant Israeli culture, and in many of his novels, the protagonists—rebels, traitors, sinners, and heretics—give voice to subversive, anti-establishment ideologies.

Mossinsohn’s departure from the kibbutz in 1948, and later from Israel to the US for a significant period of time, marked his transition from identifying with the ideals and values of the Zionist left to a preference for positions identified with the political right.[[5]](#footnote-5) This shift in Mossinsohn’s political viewpoint was expressed in his work by a bitter criticism of moral corruption in the kibbutz, which revealed the contradiction between lofty egalitarian humanist ideals and the experience of a life full of cruelty and injustice, rage and irrationality.[[6]](#footnote-6) As a way of creating a polemical literature that challenges the Zionist meta-narrative, Mossinsohn positioned himself as, in Antonio Gramsci’s words, an “organic intellectual.”[[7]](#footnote-7) As such, Mossinsohn realized his organic affiliation with Israeli hegemony, but at the same time, maintained a perspective from which he was capable of separating himself from the political entity that produced and nurtured this hegemony in order to deconstruct the hegemonic discourse.

While the texts Mossinsohn wrote for adults often caused public uproar and challenged the inevitability of the national existence, his children’s books marked a completely different attitude substituting optimistic and uncritical validation of the core national values for his critical and defiant positions.[[8]](#footnote-8) Mossinsohn’s celebrity was based primarily on his *Hasamba* series for children, which was published from the late nineteen-forties and which was molded for mass consumption and the dissemination of the hegemonic culture. These books—which depict a group of children who engage in secret, military-style missions—are based on dichotomous, simplistic, and classifiable structures that map the values and identities of Israeli culture by means of binary opposites, which in turn hermetically mark the national collective’s ethnic boundaries. This manipulative and ideological mechanism, which presents the national reality beyond indisputable binary structures—such as ‘”loyalty” and “betrayal”—is what Mossinsohn criticizes in his novel about Judas Iscariot.

*Judas*, which Mossinsohn published after many years of literary silence and a prolonged absence from Israel, was critically acclaimed as it corresponded, to a large extent, with both the atmosphere in nineteen-sixties Israeli society and the anti-establishment movement in which many intellectuals took part. Events in the political arena in the nineteen-fifties and sixties—such as, the Kafr Qasim massacre, the Sinai Campaign, the reprisal operations, and multiple internal struggles around the Lavon Affair—marked the destabilization of the intelligentsia’s sweeping support of Ben Gurion’s government. Ben Gurion saw in the founding of the State of Israel the first stage of a messianic movement and consciously employed the messianic ethos in the framework of his political policy.[[9]](#footnote-9) Many Israeli intellectuals identified the danger in the linkage between messianism and political strength and feared that the combination between a messianic vision and unifying, homogenic politics was a first step toward transforming Israeli society into a sovereign, monolithic, chauvinistic, and anti-pluralistic entity.

This political linkage illuminates what I believe is the heart of *Judas*, a discussion of the danger inherent in the exploitation of the messianic vision in the framework of sovereignty. Through the story of Jesus and Judas Iscariot, Mossinsohn demonstrates how the national culture expropriates actual historical truth to invent a mythic, sovereign vision, and nurtures an ideological discourse that glorifies death in the name of the collective and the state while shrouding it in a halo of sanctity.

**The Evolution of Judas Iscariot in Jewish Thought**

Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaardwrote that“one will get a deep insight into the state of Christianity in every age by seeing how it interprets Judas.”[[10]](#footnote-10)TocontextualizeKierkegaard’s statement in terms of Jewish thought, it appears that the Jewish interpretation of Judas Iscariot at different moments in history is evidence of how it perceives both its relationship with Christianity and to shifts in its own self-perception—as a religion and as an ethnic, national, and political collective.

The attitude—explicit or implicit—toward Judas Iscariot in the tradition of Jewish thought is inseparable from its attitude toward Jesus. In most cases, the attitude toward these figures has a substantive and direct link with issues of Jewish identity, sovereignty, and power—vis-à-vis the non-Jewish other and in the framework of internal Jewish discourse. The Babylonian Talmud, for example, which does not mention Judas Iscariot explicitly,[[11]](#footnote-11) constitutes significant evidence of the way in which rabbinic Judaism understood and perceived the evolving Christian religion.[[12]](#footnote-12) In Tractate Sanhedrin (43a), for instance, Jesus is described as judged by the Sanhedrin because he “has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy.” Like other Talmudic tractates, this tractate clarifies that Jesus belonged to a Jewish collective before he strayed from its religious principles, and for this reason was judged and executed in accordance with Jewish law. Despite the fact that, at the time when the Babylonian Talmud was written and redacted, Jews lived under the rule of a foreign sovereign and did not have such autonomous legal authority, the importance of this tractate is in the implicit statement that the Jews were responsible for Jesus’s fate and sentenced him to death in the framework of Jewish law.

The deterioration of Jewish-Christian relations in the Middle Ages—manifested in cases of Christian blood libel that echoed the crucifixion myth—led to the appearance of a Jewish text featuring a first of its kind, detailed and sympathetic treatment of Judas Iscariot: *Toldot Yeshu*[[13]](#footnote-13) While Jesus is depicted in this book as a negative, grotesque character, and is accused of deception and corrupt morals, Judas Iscariot is described as a heroic figure—the alter-ego of the militant, ambitious Jew who is willing to sacrifice his life to preserve the Jewish faith and its practices. Judas Iscariot embarks on a determined journey in pursuit of Jesus in order to prove him a false messiah. Thus, he fulfills an important role in the framework of the collective Jewish imagination of a vengeful and violent redemption and functions as a key character in the construction of an active Jewish myth of heroism and power.[[14]](#footnote-14)

In the modern era, primarily in the eighteenth century, many Jewish thinkers strived to integrate the figure of Jesus within the Jewish heritage and to ease the historical tension between Jews and Christians for the benefit of a vision of tolerance and a shared civil space.[[15]](#footnote-15) This shift in the perception of Jesus was the result of internal changes in Judaism affected by the European Enlightenment, which forced the Jews to face “the Jewish Question” (*Die Juden Frage*): the possibility of resolving the contradiction between the universalism of liberal citizenship and the Jewish religion’s particular directives—religious and communal—as a key to Jews’ integration in modern European culture. The Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah) movement, which drew its inspiration from the values of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, strived to make Jews equal partners in European society, who would fulfill an active role in the public, civil space while preserving a Jewish way of life in the private sphere. This illusory distinction between spaces—the public and the private—encouraged members of the Haskalah movement to view the morals and humanism associated with Jesus as neutral and universal values that necessitated principles of pluralism and tolerance. Given that many Haskalah thinkers aspired to legitimize Jewish integration in non-Jewish society while preserving the Jewish religion and tradition, they maintained an unwavering sympathetic tone towards Jesus. In so doing, they wished to demonstrate that the final separation of Christianity from Judaism begins with Paul, and is not reflected in the teachings of Jesus himself.[[16]](#footnote-16) Unsurprisingly, this positive and supportive tendency toward Jesus left obscure the issue of Jewish responsibility for his arrest and death and focused mainly on the principles common to both religions.

While in the framework of European Haskalah, the Jewish re-appropriation of Jesus was largely driven by universalist motives, in the context of Zionist discourse, Jesus’s messianism—and later the story of Judas Iscariot’s betrayal as well—was reappropriated to serve a particular national project: the estbalishment of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel. As a national movement, Zionism constructed an “invented tradition”[[17]](#footnote-17) by providing a renewed and appropriating interpretation of different historical and mythic figures, who now functioned, in the context of the Zionist narrative, as parts of a historical, national Jewish succession. Thus, Jesus was identified in the Zionist discourse with ancient, indigenous, and potent Hebraism, and as the brave leader of a revolt against a foreign ruler aimed at attaining political independence. Put differently, he was recast in the form of the mythic Hebrew pioneer, who sacrifices his body to build a national homeland and renews his affinity with the Land of Israel through the redeeming act of toiling the earth.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Historian and literary scholar Joseph Klausner (1874-1958) was recognized as having a crucial impact on making Jesus a focus of fascination for Hebrew intellectuals and artists. In his monographic historical study, *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life,* *Times, and Teachings*,[[19]](#footnote-19) Klausner not only imagined Jesus as a deep-rooted Jew with an unmediated affinity with the Land of Israel, but also provided a contemporary political and national interpretation of Jesus’s life and teachings that echoed the political changes when the book was written: the transformation of Jewish culture into a national and sovereign culture in the Land of Israel. The fundamental premise of Klausner’s main argument is that Judaism, which constitutes “a national worldview, with a religious-moral platform,”[[20]](#footnote-20) is an indestructible complex of religious and national principles. Thus, Klausner laid the groundwork for the perception of Zionism as a project aimed at facilitating the creation of a sovereign paradigm that functions as a political theology founded on edicts determined by means of particular religious and national characteristics (and not on the national-liberal model in the form of a “civic nation”).

In what appears like a dialectic negation of the universalism that the members of the Haskalah sought to emphasize in their attitude towards Jesus and the Gospel narrative, Klausner returns to the particular and exclusive, arguing that there is no place in Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel for universal edicts and moral doctrines fashioned after Jesus.[[21]](#footnote-21) Klausner rejects the placated appeal to Christianity via universalism, claiming that this universalism is just what deprived the Jewish people in the Roman Empire of the possibility to express and realize its national needs.

There is no mention of Judas Iscariot in Klausner’s proposed historical account. However, by way of his depiction of Jesus as an observant Jew motivated by political, rather than theological, considerations to choose a different path than the “chosen people,” he laid the groundwork for Hebrew writers who sought to grant Judas Iscariot a place in their work. Interestingly, the sympathetic reception of Jesus into the domain of Judaism and Hebrew literature did not entail hostility towards Judas Iscariot. Rather, as arises from Mossinsohn’s novel, this reception castboth Jesus and Judas as characters who are identified with the same national faction and as commrades in the sovereign undertaking, even if they represented as having different views and *modi operandi*. For Mossinsohn, Judas Iscariot became even more relevant than Jesus in terms of his attempt to present an internal criticism of the Zionist project, which deals with complex questions of sovereign power and violence.[[22]](#footnote-22) Mossinsohn portrays Judas not as a traitor, but rather as a militant and patriotic Jew who finds himself betrayed by the very same sovereign mechanism he served as a loyal emissary.

**Judas Iscariot and the Criticism of the Israeli Sovereignty**

The plot of *Judas*, which was published in 1962, takes place ten years after Jesus was crucified and is communicated as a retrospective account from Judas Iscariot’s point of view. It begins with the following words: “I am about to be crucified. I am lying in the prison of the port city of Garamus, during the reign of the emperor Caius Caligula, ten years after the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth and my flight from my own country, my homeland” (3). Judas Iscariot is described as having been an anti-Roman underground fighter who inadvertently became caught up in a political intrigue when his commander, Barabbas, ordered him to turn in Jesus to the Roman authorities. Judas was unaware, however, of the secret plan concocted by Barabbas and Jesus, who thought that the latter’s death would ignite the Jewish street and lead to the outbreak of a sweeping revolt against the Romans. But when Jesus’s death failed to rouse the Jews from their political apathy, Judas was accused of betrayal and was forced to flee from Canaan, leaving his life in the Jewish underground behind. He arrives at the beach of the Greek island Garamus where he is found by a man named Andigones. Andigones takes Judas to an inn owned by a woman named Martha who later becomes his wife. From the moment of his arrival, Judas conceals his true identity and calls himself Antiper, until one day his old friend Andigones brings him “a bundle of scrolls containing strange and fascinating tales [...] about a strange, amazing man from a village called Nazareth” (8). As revealed later, Andigones had received the scrolls from Simon Peter, one of Jesus’s apostles who had come to Garamus to preach Christianity and to search for Judas Iscariot and punish him for his “betrayal.” This is despite the fact that in his conversation with a man he assumes is a gentile named Antiper, Peter himself explicitly says:

We know that Judas did not betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. We know that Barabbas ordered Judas to deliver up Jesus. But more than that, we know that Jesus believed he had to be crucified. Jesus believed that his crucifixion would signal the beginning of the revolt. He sacrificed himself knowingly and willingly, and Judas served as the agent of both Barabbas and Jesus. We know all this. But in spite of the fact that we do know the truth, not one letter concerning Judas Iscariot’s betrayal and death must be changed in the scrolls. (55-56)

When Simon Peter discovers that Antiper the Edomite is really Judas Iscariot, he warns him not to reveal the truth about the circumstances of Jesus’s arrest and death and thereby to enable the continuation of the missionary dissemination of the mythic narrative, which had become popular even among pagan cultures, like the one on Garamus. The preservation of the myth of Jesus’s life and death is presented as necessary for the recruitment of new believers, and therefore even characters who are aware of the invented aspects of this myth do everything they can to maintain it. At the same time, Andigones—Judas’s good friend and confidant who is revealed to be a double-crossing government agent—under what appears to be the influence of Evangelical writings, to carry out his plan to make Judas Iscariot Garamus’s new saint. Pursued by Peter Simon and his men, on the one hand, and by the scheming Andigones, on the other, Judas is compelled to confess to crimes he did not commit and, like Jesus, is sentenced to death by crucifixion.

In Mossinsohn’s novel, the betrayal is represented as absurd and entirely unfounded, and the myth depicted in the New Testament is frequently confronted with the historical reality upon which it is based. The creation of the myth and its relentless preservation are presented as deliberate measures taken by the apostles to serve their missionary goals, not unlike their distortion of Jesus’s doctrine as a means to establish a mass religious movement. Not only does Judas Iscariot not constitute Jesus’s opposite in the novel, but both are presented as comrades in the same Jewish underground whose political activities eventually determined their fate. In the novel, they are both depicted as tragic puppets subjected to a system of political and religious considerations driven by indefatigable motivation to create the image of a saint for the masses.

Similar to the Jewish tradition that underscores the human and corporeal in Jesus, Mossinsohn’s Judas negates the divine and sublime dimensions of Jesus’s character: “Jesus was a remarkable human being. Why did they need to make him the son of God? I don’t understand” (118). By depicting Jesus as a Jewish character operating in the national context, it seems that Mossinsohn is challenging Klausner, who saw Jesus as presenting a moral doctrine that distorted and repressed the national needs of the Jewish people. Mossinsohn describes Jesus as imbued with a sense of national duty, but also as someone who took this sense of duty to an extreme that is the opposite of the pacifist and universalist extreme described by Klausner. In Mossinsohn’s case, Jesus’s fervor to be crucified as a way to incite Jewish uprising, and his willingness to give his life to spark a national struggle, are portrayed in the novel as an oscillation between unfounded national zealotry and political messianism based on a defective perception of reality.

**Sovereign Renunciation and Criticism of the Sublime Death**

The references in the novel to the formation of Jesus’s sacred and messianic myth (and eventually Judas Iscariot’s as well) can be read as criticism of how Israeli society nationalizes its dead and transforms them into national heroes who justify its course. The fact that Jesus died in vain does not stand in the way of his positioning as a sacred and admired figure. The myth around Jesus’s death, and his imagined messianic halo, are depicted in the novel as part of a wonted national mechanism that imbues individuals—real and historical—with sacred and ahistorical myths for the purpose of sustaining the life of the national collective.

The awe surrounding death and its appropriation as a significant aspect of national existence are at the root of the Israeli national discourse, as in the case of other national movements. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson clarifies his argument—that a nation constitutes an imagined community given that the affinity between its members is based on the imaginary mental activity of a single collective entity—by way of describing the role of the monument to Unknown Soldiers: “No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers.”[[23]](#footnote-23) These tombs, which are “saturated with ghostly national imaginings,”[[24]](#footnote-24) constitute liminal sites that connect the living collective and its dead, and are therefore necessary for the national community’s imagining. The individual’s private death thus serves the collective’s existential needs and is appropriated to buttress its self-perception as an organic and unified unit.

The process by which citizens are granted a sacred, national status is presented in Mossinsohn’s novel as a consequence of sovereign renunciation, which encourages heroic death over the choice of life. Judas Iscariot strives to fulfill his civic duty and cooperate with the sovereign by exposing Andigones and Simon Peter as double agents and handing them over to the authorities. This act, which marked Judas as a betrayer in the New Testament, is depicted in the novel as part of standard civic duty whose purpose is to preserve the social and political order:

I had come to seek justice, to speak personally with the director of the bureau about Simon Peter’s subversion against the authority of the state gods and about Andigones’ rebellious statements. As I walked, in my mind’s eye I could see the bureau director’s silvery hair and a round, friendly face filled with the light of understanding. He would invite me to sit down and I would apologize for taking his valuable time. He would reply that I should not feel that way. On the contrary, he was pleased that I had come. Citizens such as myself are the glory of the city, the salt of the earth, the pride of their mothers, who bore them. […]. The director of the bureau then will offer me a reward for my faithfulness and loyalty […]. (147)

Alongside the fantasy of the positive recompense Judas would receive for fulfilling his civic duty, the governor’s precinct is described as “a dead, abandoned city, with not one either coming or going” (146) and functions as a spectacular display of the sovereign’s desertion of the citizen who wishes to cooperate with and devote themselves to its regulating power. Against this background of abandonment and silence, in one of the deserted offices, Judas discovers dazed clerks hard at work carving wooden statues in his image:

Had the window been barred, I would have suspected that I had come upon a madhouse. […]. ‘We are carving here for the Bureau of Faith and Religions,’ the young one said. ‘Come in.’ I had never heard that the Bureau of Religions was involved in any sort of carving. […]. At the top of the stairs, I walked the length of a porch with wooden pillars […]. I went into the room. […]. But now, as I scanned the room, startled by what I saw, I realized why. In the room there stood thirty wooden statues, all of them alike. They were exact copies of the statue which the scoundrel Andigones had sculptured of me. ‘The precinct is empty,’ I said, confused. (148)

The juxtaposition of the sense of repudiation with the main form of labor performed within the confines of the precinct, in a room “which was full of icons and death masks” (149), reveals the Janus-face of sovereignty: the fine line between overseeing sovereignty, responsible for the glorification of the dead and the adoration idol production line, and forsaking sovereignty that refuses to act as a responsible agent that fulfills its duties toward its citizens and exposes them to arbitrary violence.[[25]](#footnote-25) The sovereign authority, whether concealed or manifest in the ritual of crowning messiahs and saints, is not revealed in the novel to its fullest extent, but rather primarily by way of its performances of neglect, desertion, and renunciation. Contrary to what appears in the Talmud and medieval Jewish sources, Mossinsohn’s novel does not describe an extant sovereign and legal Jewish authority, which takes full responsibility for its actions, and the human sacrifices are always offered by a sovereign who refuses to be revealed.

The discovery that the wise sage Andigones, who “was sitting at the table covered with an embroidered cloth, its border trimmed with tassels of gold” (150), is a collaborator who participates in the carving of the statues, on the one hand, and the implied allusion in the thirty carved statues to the thirty coins Judas Iscariot received for betraying Jesus (ibid), on the other hand, call for a new reading of the balance of power between loyalty and betrayal within the sovereign framework. In the sovereign space from which the sovereign is absent, it is not Judas, “the upright, loyal citizen” (152), who is cast in the role of the betrayer, but rather the sovereign authority that operates a utilitarian mechanism of messianic worship and sacrifices its citizens. Similar to the way in which supervision and abandonment constitute the sovereignty’s complementary performances, so too the statue carving, which heralds Judas Iscariot’s imminent death, is portrayed as an act of systemized preparation that is part of the daily routine. This conduct is in line with what Giorgio Agamben describes as the trademark of sovereign power: the implementation of a methodical policy, which is neither exceptional nor deviant, that contains a preexisting option to renounce the citizens and leave them exposed to the arbitrariness of the sovereign’s ruling.[[26]](#footnote-26)

**The Living-Dead and the Israeli Saint Industry**

The messianic drama in the New Testament, which deals with Jesus’s death and resurrection, constitutes in Mossinsohn’s novel the groundwork for a hidden dialogue with a key figure in the Zionist culture and in modern Hebrew literature: the living-dead. The poet Nathan Alterman was responsible for making the figure of the living-dead an inseparable feature of modern Hebrew literature of the nineteen-forties. His poem *The Silver Platter* describes a teenaged boy and teenaged girl “giving no sign of life or death” as they face a “heart-torn yet alive” nation.[[27]](#footnote-27) Their depiction as a liminal entity straddling life and death provides the basis for understanding the reward that the national culture offers those who sacrifice their lives on the national alter: they will become the living-dead—heroes who gave their lives for a noble cause and will live for eternity in the consciousness of the national collective. The poem’s publication on December 19, 1947 in the “Tor Hashvi’i” in the newspaper *Davar* prior to the formal declaration of the founding of the state and after only twenty days of fighting, is indicative of how Alterman sought to prime the Israeli collective for legitimizing heroic death on behalf of the sovereign and for believing that such death invariably bears a promise of redeeming resurrection. Like Jesus, the living-dead of nineteen-forties Hebrew poetry served as part of the religious redemption narrative; like Jesus, who through his crucifixion atoned for his people’s sins, so too the living-dead is elevated to the sacred and shifts from the private to the public domain. Similar to the living-dead, the mythic image of Jesus constitutes a synthesis between a corporeal human and an immortal element destined for redemption.

Mossinsohn’s novel takes a hard line against the inflationary use of the living-dead figure for consolatory and propaganda purposes. This inflation, as it arises from the novel, summons an inherent contradiction that obscures the distinction between the categories of “loyalty” and “betrayal.” The transformation of a human being into the living-dead is the consequence of the sovereign’s betrayal, of the authority’s renunciation of human life, and the exploitation of death for its own ends. This critical approach positions Jesus and Judas Iscariot in a similar betrayed position, as they are both crucified and become living-dead figures for the purpose of satisfying the nation’s desires and its collective needs. While Jesus’s death is depicted as meaningless and lacking political ramifications, his collective representation is exaltation and immortalization that do not reflect the material reality. Jesus, whose death did not shock the nation and lead it to rebellion, is engrained in the national memory in a distorted fashion that represses the actual circumstances of his death: “‘Ten years ago, Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by Roman officers at the order of Pontius Pilot, procurator of Judea by the grace of emperor Tiberius, and the life and death of this man of Nazareth have already been cloaked in strange legends’” (9). The gap between the descriptions of Jesus’s death, on the one hand, and his memorialization, on the other, is evidence that his constitution as living-dead, which is embedded in the representational systems that nurture the frameworks of national life, became the main focal point and marginalized interest in his historical figure, which, as mentioned, neither affected reality nor led to a revolt in the Jewish street.

Similarly, Andigones seeks to convince Judas Iscariot to confess his betrayal of Jesus so that he can become Garamus’s new saint: “‘I wagered Marcus that I could successfully create a local saint. Sometimes people raise flowers in hothouses, stimulating a flower’s growth. I told Marcus that under certain conditions it is possible to fashion a myth, a legend, even a new god’ [...]. ‘You shall be the saint of Garamus,’ Andigones repeated. ‘You possess all the qualifications’” (133-34). In both cases, the lives of those who became living-dead—Judas Iscariot and Jesus—are rendered inconsequential and undefended. Their material existence is subjugated to what is ostensibly the primary purpose: the conversion of historical human beings into sanctified dead, who in turn, are “resuscitated” in the nation’s collective memory. Both Judas Iscariot and Jesus are presented in the novel as victims of the same sovereign order, which is willing to sacrifice their lives to produce the exalted figure of the living-dead.

The “saint industry” is presented in the novel as a well-oiled machine that transforms living individuals into living-dead, however not for purposes of spiritual rehabilitation or the moral butressing of faith in the just cause, but for purposes of livelihood, business, and profit. The boy and girl in Alterman’s poem sacrifice themselves for what is presented as an exalted purpose, and by so doing, they become an inseparable part of the collective for which they gave their lives. However, Mossinsohn refutes these objectives and presents them as lacking any dimension of the sublime. Andigones’s words clarify this when he explains to Judas Iscariot how his death will benefit the city’s people:

‘Now then, Antiper, about the statues. I am assuming that my program, the program for fashioning our saint, will be successful and I am acting accordingly. As you know, many people earn their livelihood through faiths and religions. And there is certainly nothing wrong with that. Vendors of sacrificial animals, spice dealers, leather workers, guards, attendants and guides, scribes producing scrolls and amulets, candle merchants, tombstone makers, artisans expert in engraving upon marble, priests officiating in front of the altar […]—all of them earn their livelihood through religion. This would imply that it is our saint’s affair not only to increase morality and the fear of heaven, but to serve as a source of sustenance for thousands of people […] We can expect opposition from the local priests, but on the other hand we can anticipate hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, flourishing business, taxes paid willingly by proprietors of successful businesses—and we shall not relegate the manufacture of statues to the end of the list, statues of the saint of Garamus.’ (153-54)

Thus, the figure of the living-dead is freed from religiosity, exaltedness, and spirit. Mossinsohn offers a highly prosaic and degrading interpretation of the vitality that death bestows on the living-dead, and substitutes it with a materialistic, cynical, and cold depiction that discloses the true purpose of those who are exploited in the name of the national collective mission.

The adulation of death and the dead, as conveyed in the novel, yields a pagan culture that sanctifies death, which, quite absurdly, flows in the veins of the social collective. For example, when Judas Iscariot encounters, in Asclepius temple, a sick young man accompanied by two women with “a necklace of human bones” (211) hanging around his neck:

I approached the women, presenting myself to them simply as one of the many people visiting the temple […] continuing apologetically that I had unintentionally overheard their conversation […]. ‘You must first grind the bones of the dead,’ I explained, ‘grind them into fine dust, and sprinkle this bone dust into water when the moon is full. The one who is afflicted must drink this potion morning, noon and night.’ […]. ‘We have done it, said the woman… […]. ‘Naturally, we have already done that.’ (ibid)

Jesus’s healing miracles, which in the New Testament give life to the sick and save them from death, are substituted, in Judas Iscariot’s words, with a formula of salvation not from death, but rather through death. This literalization illuminates in a critical light the death rites of the national culture, for which the dead, not the living, become the main source of vitality.

The critical debate on the living-dead motif in the novel serves as the means for a conceptual and challenging exploration of the notion of betrayal and its political ramifications. Interestingly, Judas Iscariot’s betrayal—that is, his turning in of Jesus—is described in the novel as the other side of loyalty, and encourages a critical interrogation of the absurd juxtaposition that the national culture forms between the two. An example of this type of coupling arises from another familiar employment of the living-dead figure, this time in Haim Guri’s poem *Here Our Bodies Lie*.[[28]](#footnote-28) In this poem, which was written in memory of Danny Mass and his platoon, the speakers, dead soldiers, are called upon to free themselves from guilt and clarify that their deaths in battle were part of a heroic struggle; that they were not led as innocent flock to slaughter. This purification is performed by way of their reciting the words “We did not betray. Look, our weapons are held close emptied of bullets, our pouches empty” (my translation). The absolute loyalty of those who died to protect the homeland still necessitates, in Guri’s poem, the self-absolution for what may appear as betrayal and what may be perceived as a display of passive death. Mossinsohn proposes a similar coupling of loyalty and betrayal in his novel, however from the standpoint of an attempt to articulate, in critical terms, the paradoxical and impossible proximity that the national discourse generates in regard to betrayal and loyalty. Not only are Judas Iscariot and Jesus presented as those betrayed by the nation’s symbolic fathers—Barabbas, commander of the Jewish underground, and Andigones, the wise sage who is revealed to be a covert government agent—but, at least in Judas’s case, the betrayal is the consequence of absolute loyalty.

Similar to the lost gnostic Gospel of Judas, in the novel, Judas’s betrayal is presented as motivated by total devotion, however in this case, his devotion is not to Jesus, but to his commander Barabbas, who entrusted him with the mission. Judas Iscariot’s betrayal is constituted, therefore, in the fact that he was a “too-good” underground fighter who demonstrated absolute loyalty to his commander and who followed orders without hesitation or doubt. Judas Iscariot’s betrayal indeed stems from his being a product of over-identification with the ideological mechanisms of the national system: “He ordered me to turn Jesus over to the authorities; and I obeyed. I was a soldier of the underground and not a garrulous Pharisee” (161). Thus, while the living-dead in Haim Guri’s poem eliminate any doubt pertaining to their betrayal of the nation, from Judas Iscariot’s viewpoint in Mossinsohn’s novel, the nation, or its representatives, are those who betray the living-dead:

But my commander surrounded me with guile and deceit. He had no particular reason for sending me to point out Jesus. […]. The lot fell upon me because I acted like a loyal, devoted dog. I possessed no unusual power or perception. My one asset lay in the fact that I was loyal to Barabbas […]I was an ordinary soldier […] Barabbas was in charge of the revolt, and it is not normal for a soldier to question the orders of the chief commander […] Had I known that it was Jesus' wish to be crucified […] I would have refused to carry out the order. (188-189)

Judas Iscariot’s only fault is that he demonstrated unwavering and blind loyalty, which not only led him to betray Jesus, but which eventually also caused his own death. He was mistaken when he internalized beyond measure the rational underpinning of the “saint industry,” that is, the notion of the living-dead: “I found myself in a silly, absurd situation, and I enjoyed thinking about the desire of that bastard, Andigones, to make me that saint of Garamus” (199). The internalization of this necessity to become a saint reaches absurdity in Judas’s willingness to die on account of his loyalty to the collective and his unwillingness to disappoint it:

Since it makes no difference whether they put me to death for one crime or for many crimes, I have followed Antigones’ advice, confessing to as many crimes as possible. I have taken all the sins of the holly community of Garamus upon myself. I had no other choice. The hairy wood cravers of Andigones would have labored for naught if I were not to be crucified. And they worked hard from sunrise to sunset […]. To disappoint them would have been out of the question […] If I were to go free, all their toil would have been in vain. (289)

The figure of the living-dead, which was formulated to rouse motivation for and the desire for self-sacrifice on behalf of the nation, is based on the framing of death an object of fascination and on its presentation as a beautiful, sublime aesthetic figure. In the novel, Mossinsohn describes the aestheticization of death and the sense of spiritual elevation experienced by those hungry for murder in his description of the Romans and Persians who were “concerned not with the ground but with the art of performing the execution” (5). The image of Jesus himself, the sacred living-dead, is depicted in a manner that subverts the glorification of death and abstains from presenting it in coarse physical form. While the physical portrayal of Jesus’s crucifixion in the New Testament is mainly subtle and understated, thereby facilitating the glorification of his image and highlighting his sacred attributes,[[29]](#footnote-29) Mossinsohn’s depiction replaces the celebration of death with a debased, graphic description: Jesus is portrayed as dying a death “bereft of beauty—only flies [...] There were green-winged, fat flies, large as locusts. They have been reared on the meals which the rulers offer them daily. And there were flies which you could not see, *barchash* flies which enter the nostrils, the ears [...]” (190). This tangible and contemptable description seems, therefore, to constitute a distinctive contrast to the softened portrayals of death in Alterman and Guri’s poems. By underscoring the materiality of Jesus’s death, Mossinsohn not only undermines the aestheticization of death itself, but also underscores its finality and subverts the very attempt, embodied in the living-dead Jesus figure, to link this death to a future transcendental existence.

Mossinsohn’s use of the living-dead figure in the novel should be considered from a wider perspective, one that scrutinizes its earlier dialectic manifestations in Jewish-national thought. Before representing an apt subjectivity in the Israeli national discourse, the living-dead was a liminal figure that served as evidence of the menacing nature of the Jewish ghost nation, which lacked autonomous territory and a sovereign framework. In his celebrated work, *Auto-emancipation* (1882)—which physician and philosopher Leon Pinsker wrote in response to the failure of the emancipation and the pogroms of 1881—the Jewish nation is presented as an intimidating ghost nation that wanders among other nations, arousing in them an incurable genetic psychosis referred to as Judeophobia.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Pinsker’s version of the living-dead figure is the product of a diasporic existence lacking national roots or organic-sovereign cohesion. It is interesting to note that the novel’s description of Judas Iscariot elicits an affinity with both the living-dead that was appropriated for political purposes in the Israeli national discourse, and with the living-dead that was perceived in the Zionist discourse as representing an anomalous and a-territorial Jewish existence. Judas Iscariot is described, in this context, as someone whose life circumstances sentenced him to a nomadic existence and a complex of identity markers ranging from monotheistic Jew and Edomite to a son of the empire who believes in the gods of Greece and Rome:

“For ten years I had been Antiper the Idumean. I had married a gentile, spurned the heritage of my fathers, prayers and commandments, and I had buried the past of Judas Iscariot. I was Antiper the Idumean and I sought to forget my unfortunate country, its rebellions and crucifixions and its slain, and the judgment day at Golgotha, the day of the crucifixion of Jesus.” (11)

Judas later describes his diasporic life, constituted primarily in terms of his withdrawal from the national existence and a constant state of foreignness: “I was a rootless defector and cried over the fact that I severed my roots with my own hands. I was a foreigner and stranger in Garamus, and a foreigner and stranger in my country and homeland. I married a gentile woman and disguised myself for ten tiresome years. I forgot my prayers and the earth of my homeland [...] ‘I have no roots,’ I said.”[[31]](#footnote-31) Not only is Judas Iscariot’s image fashioned from a critical standpoint vis-à-vis the living-dead constructed by the national Hebrew discourse, but his rootless image does not seek a remedy, in Pinsker’s terms, for its pathological existence. On the contrary, it presents life in the diaspora as a moral solution for the violence involved in realizing the national vision: “due to the tumult and slaughter afflicting my country too frequently through the fanaticism and stubbornness of the Jews, I had decided to go into exile” (4).

By presenting Judas Iscariot as a hybrid character that simultaneously embodies two contrasting Jewish identities—one identified with the living-dead as a sovereign figure based on the “improved Jew” who sacrifices his self for the homeland; and the other identified with the living-dead as a diasporic, threatening figure lacking a sovereign existence—Mossinsohn negates the dialectic view that perceives these figures as positioned on a diachronic and evolving continuum. In contrast to Zionist historiography, in the framework of which the two versions of the living-dead were presented as separate, essentially opposite, temporal and spatial stages, Mossinsohn’s novel presents them in their simultaneous existence. These simultaneous representations constitute, therefore, an essentially anti-dialectic and ahistorical gesture that subverts Zionist teleology in whose framework the appearance of one figure inevitably negates the other.

This simultaneous representation of two fundamentally different “living-dead” figures raises questions as to the critical standpoint implied in the novel. On the one hand, this simultaneity may reflect a critical-political stance that discloses an inextricable linkage between sovereign existence and the diasporic, and the assumption that in its Zionist formulation, sovereign existence is perceived more as “diaspora in the Land of Israel” than the “dawn of redemption.” On the other hand, this simultaneity can be read as Mossinsohn’s attempt to avoid the unmitigated adoption of the critical role of literary “betrayer.” The integration of sovereign and diasporic trends in Mossinsohn’s text may be read not as an ideological and political “betrayal” of the national agenda, but rather as a means for its ratification: the retreat to the diasporic, or semi-diasporic, state can in fact be understood as a way to relieve the burden of responsibility with regard to reality—the sovereign, not the diasporic—and for the renunciation of the material circumstances in which the novel was written.[[32]](#footnote-32) The tension between the two representational systems of the living-dead raises the possibility that it is precisely the “invasion” of the diaspora into the sovereign life that constitutes a means to preserve the position that points to, as Hanan Hever writes, those “who hold the ruling political system and are permitted to use it” as part of the persecuted minority’s oppositional position.[[33]](#footnote-33) This standpoint may eventually lead “to the evasion of responsibility imposed upon the sons and daughters of the majority.”[[34]](#footnote-34) In what appears as a possible answer to the question regarding the extent of Mossinsohn’s criticism, the end of the novel clarifies that Judas Iscariot occupies an indecisive intermediary position that is both critical and informative. He does not perform an ultimate act betrayal, one that implies a tangible escape route from the mechanisms of power and authority, but rather outlines, in the framework of these mechanisms, an alternative way to produce meaning: the use of the language of messianism and redemption, however from a perspective that is not identified with the conventional interpretation in sovereign discourse.

**Betrayal Limited: From Zionist Messianism to Eschatological Messianism**

At the end of the novel, Judas realizes that he is destined to serve as yet another victim in the well-oiled machine of the national sainthood—living-dead—industry: “After the death sentence was decreed,” the Roman soldier Pantrei says to him in the prison cell, “everyone began loving you and praising you” (301). On the verge of becoming Garamus’s new saint, Judas Iscariot “pondered rebellious, vain thoughts” (302), however, in response to Andigones’s proposal, that he board a Sidonian ship waiting for him in the port and start a new life, he chooses to passively await his death: “‘Thank you, but no,’ I said. ‘I want to continue sleeping. I’m too weary to go on walking in that circle’” (303). This response epitomizes the alternative political position that Mossinsohn proposes through the character of Judas Iscariot, and which is crystalized in the novel’s closing words:

I lay down on my bed again and Andigones covered me with a blanket. Drawing the blanket over my head, I closed my eyes and at once sank into the realm of the night, where we had been in an era long gone by, before God made His first mistake by creating the light. (303)

Under the canopy of his blanket, it becomes clear to Judas that he will not take steps to change his destiny, and will rather instill his death with a messianic significance different from that of the Zionist redemption narrative—a meaning based on the eschatological concept of annihilation and the end of days. The sense of revelation that Judas describes, which is based on a gnostic aspiration of unification with a divine-transcendental entity and a return to the anthropic, pre-creation bosom of the divine sovereign,[[35]](#footnote-35) thus lays a dual groundwork for betrayal: one based on a gnostic renunciation of the Christian theological narrative and the other based on a national renunciation of the active messianic conceptualization of the Zionist project.

While it considers itself a secular movement, Zionism was never an essentially secular project, but was rather founded on a theological principle that presented the emigration to the Land of Israel and the building of the national homeland as part of a non-eschatological process of redemption. As Yotam Hotam argues, Zionism constitutes a modern and inverted version of the gnostic paradigm, which was translated into Jewish-national terms. While gnosis was originally based on a dualistic division between transcendental divinity and imminent nature, and views the liberation from the shackles of the material world and the unification with the transcendental divinity as the key to redemption, Zionism espouses the material return to history by way of living on the land and building a sovereign state.[[36]](#footnote-36) By denying the theological and spiritual foundations of Jewish existence, Zionism promotes the absolute return to immanency—by way of political activity that will lead to the establishment of a Jewish state. The theological language, which is deeply absorbed in the Zionist discourse, bases redemption on human enterprise in an imminent and material space, and not on a divine plan that offers transcendental intervention uncontrollable by man. Therefore, Zionism substituted “transcendental messianism,” in which redemption is controlled by the heavenly sovereign, with “Promethean messianism,” at the center of which is rational man who determines his destiny within history as he sees fit.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Thus, the salvation that Judas Iscariot proposes is revealed as gnostic salvation, which redeems him from the imminent world and unites him with the divine source. During the moments in which he awaits his crucifixion, Judas finds his redemption by way of inverting Zionist Gnosticism: by reconstructing a pre-genesis moment, he substitutes the restorative national messianism with utopic-eschatological messianism and with unification with the divine transcendentality. Given that the political-national redemption in the novel is disclosed as fraudulent, forsaking, and appropriating, the redemption that Judas adheres to defies the Zionist notion of progress and marks a breach of the historical continuity. If Zionism speaks for the active return to history, Judas’s denial of the messianic-national narrative is manifested in his choice of the opposite messianic option: withdrawing from history, which is associated with waiting, passivity, and an inanimate state, while replacing the human, Promethean but disappointing, sovereign with the divine once again.

It appears therefore, that Mossinsohn does not view betrayal as an actual option for Judas Iscariot, given that regardless of whether he dies or escapes—he will be recorded in the history books as a saint and will be inducted into the canonical messianic narrative. However, within this rather limited range of possibilities, and without shirking the ideological structures in which it exists, Judas Iscariot creates an alternative narrative that internalizes the messianic logic but provides it with a different interpretation. As the individual who, in the novel, is described as a member of the underground who turns Jesus over for political reasons associated with inciting national revolt, Judas is now completely de-politicizing his messianism, in so doing, refuses to cooperate with the national messianism’s appropriation of the dead-saints (living-dead). In preferring a utopic and eschatological model of messianism identified with the end of history, Judas Iscariot chooses the opposite of what the people of Garamus chose for him when they sought to crown him as a saint, in order to cultivate the local residents’ existential and historical—social and national—frameworks. He returns, in fact, to a gnostic, anti-cosmic, and anti-imminent position that negates materialistic existence and nullifies it. This act criticizes how Israeli sovereignty paradoxically works against inherent historical reality to realize its political aspirations: like many national projects, it transforms historical figures into the living-dead, crowns humans saints with no actual substance, and substitutes the historical and imminent with myth, which, as Roland Barthes explains, speaks in a language fundamentally different than the language of history.[[38]](#footnote-38)

1. Jorge Luis Borges. “Three Versions of Judas.” *Fictions*. New York: Grove Press. 1962 [1944], pp. 151-158. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A similar narrative arises from the “lost” gospel according to Judas Iscariot, which was found in a third century Coptic manuscript discovered in archeological excavations in 1978 in the El-Minya desert in Egypt. This gospel subverts the theological perceptions of the Christian gospels in the New Testament, and presents the character of Judas Iscariot as a gnostic paradigm of absolute dedication to Christ. Bart D. Ehrman. *The Lost Gospel of Judas Iscariot: A New Look at Betrayer and Betrayed*. Oxford University Press. 2008, pp. 1-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Judas Iscariot became—especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—the focus of extensive literary production that strived to rehabilitate his image, to resurrect him as a promethean hero with ambivalent and contradictory characteristics, and to even crown him the embodiment of modern man’s desperate and defiant voice in the age after the death of God. See for instance: Ken Smith. *Judas: A Biographical Novel of the Life of Judas Iscariot*. Lincoln: Ink, 2001; James Reich. *Judas: A Novel*. Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2011; Tosca Lee. *Iscariot: A Novel of Judas*. New York: Howard Books, 2013; Amos Oz. *Judas*. London: Penguin Books, 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. From here on, all quotations in the text are taken from the translated English version: Igal Mossinsohn. *Judas*. Translation: Jules Harlow. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1963. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Gershon Shaked. “Through a Man: On the Literary Work of Igal Mossinsohn.” *Mekhkarei Yerushalaim Bisifrut* *Ivrit* (1990): pp. 223-251 [p.240]. [In Hebrew] [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Avner Holzman. “Portrait of Realistic Fiction.” *Mada Hayahadut* 34 (1994): pp. 149-156 [p. 153]. [In Hebrew] [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Antonio Gramsci. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, New York: International Publications, 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Yael Dar. “Between the Dissolution of the Palmach and Children’s Stories. Moshe Shamir and Igal Mossinsohn Write for Children Against the Background and Conflicts Between Mapai and Mapam during the Independence War.” Mordechai Bar-On and Meir Hazan (Eds.) *Politika Bemilkhama: Kovetz Mekhkarim al Hahevra Haezrakhit Bimilkhemet Haatzmaut*. Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 2014. pp. 580-598 [p. 593]. [In Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. David Ohana. *Messianism and Mamlachtiut – Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals – Between Political Vision and Political Theology*. The Ben-Gurion Research Institute, 2003, pp. 254 [In Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Søren Kierkegaard. Papers and Journals. Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970, pp. 512. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Israel Yaacov Yuval argues that Judas Iscariot is indeed referenced, albeit in a circumvented and indirect manner, in the narratives of the destruction of the Temple in tractate Gittin 55b-57a, and in the story on Kamtz and Bar Kamtza. (Israel Yaacov Yuval. *Two Gentiles in Your Stomach. Jews and Christians. Mutual Images*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2000, pp. 55-67.) [In Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In contrast to the Babylonian Talmud, the Palestinian Talmud does not contain texts that can be understood as referring to Jesus or Christianity. According to the prevalent hypothesis, Christianity’s status as the official religion of the Roman Empire dictated a more cautious approach to Christianity in writing on the part of the Jews who lived in Palestine (under Roman rule). In contrast, in the Persian empire, both Jews and Christians were considered religious minorities living under the Persian legal system and the official Zoroastrian religion, and therefore the Jews had far more liberty to express ambivalent positions in regard to the Christina minority with whom they lived as neighbors. (Peter Schäfer. *Jesus in the Talmud*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, pp. 123). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ora Limor. “The Jewish Anti-Christian Polemic Through the Generations.” *Pe’amim* 75 (1998): pp. 94-96. [In Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For example, in one of the versions of the book a story is presented that describes how Judas Iscariot stole Jesus’s body and hid it in his garden. In response to Queen Helena’s threats to kill all of the Jews if the body was not returned, Judas Iscariot leads a pogrom against Christians in Jerusalem. Judas is depicted here not only as the savior of Judaism, but also as the redeemer of Jews, who transforms his people from passive and weak victim to a powerful, militant collective. (Ora Limor and Israel Jacob Yuval. "Judas Iscariot: Revealer of the Hidden Truth." W P. Schafer, Y. Deutsch, & M. Meerson (eds.), Toledot Yeshu (“The Life Story of Jesus”) Revisited (ss. 197–220). Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck. 2011, pp. 206 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Mati Silver. “A Jewish View of Jesus: Steven Weiss, Yosef Klausner, and the Discussion on Jesus the Jew Between Two World Wars.” *Zion: Quarterly for Studies in Israeli History* (2005): pp. 31-62.) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This, for example, is how Moses Mendelssohn, in his famous correspondence with Catholic priest Johann Kasper Lavater, explains why he does not object to conversion out of contempt for Christianity, but precisely due to his acceptance of Jesus’s instruction that ordered Jews to stay loyal to their faith. See: Zvi Sadan. *Flesh of Our Flesh: Jesus of Nazareth in Zionist Thought*. Jerusalem: Carmel, 2008: 18-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. As Eric Hobsbawm claims, nations are not based on ancient traditions, but on invented traditions

    (constructed as ancient) designed to create social and communal cohesion among the civilians of the nation-state. These traditions are not authentic and spontaneous, but rather a manifestation of social and cultural engineering process aimed at instilling a sense of continuous historical existence and the legitimization of the nation-state’s existence in the present. Eric Hobsbawm. “Introduction: Inventing Traditions.” *The Invention of Tradition*. Editors: Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Cambridge University Press, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See in this context the collection “Kihiliyatainu,” published under Meir Yaari’s initiative and guidance, which contains numerous references to Jesus and his apostles as a role model for the growing group of HaShomer Hatzair settlers in Bitania Illit in 1921-1922. Also see: Muki Tsur (Ed.) *Kehilateinu*: *Pioneers’ Thoughts, Deliberations, and Desires.* Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 1987. [In Hebrew]. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Joseph Klausner. *Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teachings*. Jerusalem: Schtiebel, 1922. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid, p. 440. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid, p. 443 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Two primary examples of Hebrew literary works that ascribe significant importance to the character of Judas Iscariot in an attempt—which does not always necessarily materialize—to create a critical discourse on the issue of power and violence applied in the framework of Jewish sovereign existence are the novels *On the Narrow Path* by Aaron Abraham Kabak (1933) and Amos Oz’s *Judas* (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006 [1983], p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Yehuda Shenhav. “A Forsaking State, Corporate Responsibility, and the Post-Secular Option: A Reading of *The Human Resources Manager*.” In Amir Benbaji, Nitza Ben-Dov, and Ziva Shamir Eds*. Crossing Gazes:* *Readings of the Works of A. B. Yehoshua*. Bnei Brak: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2010, pp. 362-383. [In Hebrew] [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Nathan Alterman. “The Silver Platter.” In Esther Raizen. *No Rattling of Sabers: An Anthology of Israeli War Poetry*. Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies at University of Texas at Austin, 1995, p. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The poem appears in the collection *Pirkhai Haesh* published by Guri in 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. To compare, this is how the crucifixion of Jesus is described in the gospel according to Matthew: “And when they were come unto a place called Golgotha, that is to say, a place of a skull. They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink. And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots. And sitting down they watched him there; And set up over his head his accusation written, This Is Jesus The King Of The Jews. Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.” (27: 33-38). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Leon Pinsker. *Autoemancipation*. Translation from German: Ehad Haam. Referenced in Project Ben Yehuda. <http://benyehuda.org/ginzberg/pinsker\_autoemancipation.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Given that the parallel for the quote was not found in translation, it was translated by me from the source: Igal Mossinsohn*. Judas Iscariot: Or the Sins of Saint Garamus*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1962, p. 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. This issue is in line with Hanan Hever’s discussion on the absolution from responsibility that can be found in works written in the early sixties, even though Mossinsohn does not belong in “biological” terms to this generation of writers. (Hanan Hever. “Majority as National Minority in Israeli Fiction From the Early Nineteen-Sixties.” *Hasipur Vehaleom*. Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007, pp. 239-255) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid, pp. 240-242 (my translation). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid, p. 255 (my translation). [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The gnostic faith is based on a striking dualism between God and the world: God is the transcendental essence that is the counterpart to the material world and constitutes its absolute opposite. In gnostic terms, the tangible and material world is also described as a product of divinity, however the divinity that created it is essentially evil (the demiurge). The revolt against the extant cosmic order, that is, opposition to the evil divinity that created the material world, is expressed in an aspiration to be released from the shackles of imminent existence toward the transcendental eternity of the benevolent divinity. (Yotam Hotam. *Modern and Zionist Gnosis*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2007, pp. 45-46 [In Hebrew]) [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Hotam, 2007, pp. 45-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ohana, 2003, pp. 7-11. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Roland Barthes. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: The Noon Day Press, 1991 [1957]. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)