The dead can speak to us. I am sure of it. Not because of reading Stephen Greenblatt’s essay, but because I have been hearing them speak through literature since I was a child. Growing up in an observant Jewish family, texts were never mere historic documents for us. Phrases from Rabbinic literature were quoted on a daily basis, and figures like Rabbi Elazar and Maimonides, who had been dead for thousands of years, seemed to me to be more alive than did contemporary politicians. Dead people did not only speak to me through religion; Dostoyevsky and Amichai also spoke to me constantly during my adolescence, sharing the deepest secrets of love, madness and melancholy.

But as I grew up and attended Yeshiva for few years, and later the Hebrew University, I discovered that unfortunately not all of the dead speak to us. Some texts are kept alive by people reading them, citing them and arguing with them. Homer’s Iliad is still alive thanks to the infinite number of writers who evoke Achilles and Odysseus, and it is the same with the Talmud and the Bible. Many texts, however, have been neglected or pushed aside because of religious, cultural or political reasons. In other words, I have learned that texts can die, and it is this gloomy revelation that has pushed me to consider the possibility of text resurrection.

It made sense. Modern archaeology and philology had uncovered a large number of previously unknown ancient texts. But revealing old texts is still not resurrection. In academic journals and history books, one can find reference to only a handful of valuable texts that had not previously been part of modern literary culture. To make them part of our literary world, writers should reference them, draw inspiration from them and parodize them. I thus decided to dedicate my thesis to writers who understand the hidden potential of these ancient texts and look to them for poetic inspiration.

The Israeli poet Yonathan Ratosh provided me with a good study case. Writing in the middle of the twentieth century, Ratosh introduced the Hebrew reader to an archaic language that had never been heard before, and previously unknown Canaanite gods. Nonetheless, I was looking for something beyond exoticism. I wondered whether Ratosh had been influenced by a specific ancient text, and if so, precisely how this text had affected his poetry. The immediately obvious place to look was among the Ugarith texts that were discovered in Syria in 1928. As he was a leader of the modern ‘Canaanite’ movement that wished to adopt the ancient customs of the area, I assumed that Ratosh would have been interested in these texts as they provide an exceptional example of the ancient poetry of Canaan.

On picking up the 1936 bilingual edition of the Ugarith texts, it was immediately obvious that Ratosh had used that edition: some of the most enigmatic verses in his poetry were taken from it. Moreover, on reading the Ugarith poetry, I noticed that parallels function as a main poetic trope. One of the distinct features of Ratosh’s poetry, I recalled, is the parallel structure. Surprisingly, he not only used it in his archaic poems where Canaanite gods are mentioned and Ugarith terms are quoted, but also in his most personal modern poetry. In the ancient poetry of Canaan, I discovered, he found his personal voice, his poetic expression.

After attending the World Literature seminar and reading works by scholars such as Damrotsch and Dimcok, I decided it would be interesting to look for a parallel example on the other side of the Atlantic. Latin American literature had attracted me for long time, especially due to its evocation of ancient cultures. But in Neruda’s *Machu Picchu* or Márques’s *realismo mágico* I could not find any significant use of ancient texts.During a semester in Madrid, a tiny bibliographical note inspired me to look for an unknown essay from 1935 by Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano, *La poesía indígena de México.*

Unlike the Ugarith texts, the indigenous texts of Mexico had been available since the Spanish conquest. But many modern Mexican writers chose to ignore them: Jorge Cuesta, for example, claimed that there was no indigenous poetry in Mexico. The career of poet and essayist Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano, on the other hand, is a long endeavor to reject this notion: indigenous poetry not only exists, he claims, but can also guide the modern Mexican poet to write truthful poetry*.* In his poetry, Montellano internalized some aspects of the indigenous literature that he was so interested in. In the AECID Library, I was able to find some of the original editions of the indigenous poetry that Montellano had read and been influenced by. These texts, I discovered, serve as a key for deciphering many of the most cryptic parts of Montellano´s poetry. Moreover, many of the main characteristics of Montellano’s poetry, such as complicated imagism and the extensive use of dreams, can be traced back to this ancient literature.

Ratosh and Montellano, although they never read each other’s work, illustrate striking similarities. They both focus on the ancient text’s poetics rather than its ideology or history and customs. Although drawing inspiration from the ancient texts, they never forget their modern literary ambience, and they are assiduous readers of modern occidental literature. If I had “world enough and time” I would have liked to explore the origins of this phenomenon. In 1919, T.S Eliot called for the establishing of an English literary tradition. Is it possible that young non-European writers saw it as a challenge to find their own literary tradition?

The resurrection of dead texts is a complicated task, and during my work on my thesis, I highlighted the various figures involved in the process: historians, philologists, archeologists, translators, journal editors and so on. An understanding of the revival of non-European literary traditions demands a thorough examination of the relationships between academics, poets and editors. This necessitates examination of the impact of academic work on contemporary literary works.

Many of the issues that I have discussed in my thesis have been discussed before by Art History scholars. Paintings by Picasso from the early twentieth century and Cocteau’s essay *La rappel a l’ordre* express a wish to go backward. Not toward an imagined primitive paradise that is contrasted with the modern civilized world, as it was for the romanticists, but toward stable frameworks, toward a source of inspiration, toward tradition. In my thesis I demonstrate that literary models are to be found, not only in the Iliad or the Aeneas, but also in the Mexican Cantos and Ugarith poems. The questions thus arise: Should we reconsider our perception of literary Modernism? Should we see it as a second renaissance – a more diverse and varied one, which lets the dead speak?