



Science-Fiction Newsletter

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In Memoriam – Poul Anderson 1926-2001

It's very difficult for me to write about Poul Anderson having died.

When I was a Master's student at Berkeley, California, in 1959, I was a member of a science fiction club there, "The Elves', Gnomes' and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder and Marching Society (Berkeley Cell)", known as the "Little Men" for short. One of the other members was writer Poul Anderson, already well known. Not only did Poul come to meetings regularly, but some of the meetings were even held at his house in Orinda, over the hill from Berkeley. Thus I also made the acquaintance of Poul's wife Karen, and his daughter Astrid, then three years old.

Poul was a very friendly, generous person. He would talk cheerfully with everyone. He had his quiet opinions, but always listened respectfully to the opinions of others.

After I left Berkeley and moved to Silicon Valley, I didn't get to meetings in Berkeley very often. But – happily – the "Little Men" occasionally had a meeting in Palo Alto, and he came, so I still saw him from time to time.

Once I left the Bay Area, I had no contact with Poul for years.

However, when I started the Rehovot sf club, in 1989, I wrote him and asked him for advice, and he wrote back and gave some suggestions. I modeled the Rehovot club after the "Little Men", including having refreshments at every meeting.

After that, we had an occasional mail correspondence.

He recommended that when I come to California I go to BayCon, a local sf convention held in San Jose, California. He said that it was much preferable to going to a WorldCon, being a small, intimate convention where one could easily meet and chat with friends. Indeed, when I was at BayCon, about 1995, Poul spent most of his time sitting in the restaurant, nursing a beer, surrounded by friends, and chatting. As for "intimate" – well, BayCon had two thousand guests, which is *much* smaller than the usual U.S. WorldCon (6,000) – but not what I would call "intimate". But for Poul, sitting in the restaurant with friends, that's just what it was.

At one point he sent me some questions about Hebrew relevant to a book he was finishing (*Starfarers*, 1998) which had, among others, an Israeli heroine (200 years from now), but most of my replies reached him after the galleys were all ready, so most of my suggestions did not get into the book. Nevertheless he listed me in his acknowledgements. I wrote Poul and told him that I was glad to see that he thinks there will still be an Israel in 200 years. Poul replied as follows (30 April 1997):

"Actually, although the story involves ten people from different parts of the world, there's little ethnicity about any of them. I assume that in another 200 years or so, global communications, etc., will have pretty well wiped out such distinctions -- at least among the high-tech, cosmopolitan types who'd be involved with a space mission.

"This in turn, of course, implies that high-tech civilization will still be around by then. I don't know. Nor do I know whether there will still be a state of Israel or, for that matter, a USA -- though if the latter does survive, I do doubt very much that will then be a republic in anything but name. Quite likely the American Caesar has already been born."

He was always fair, kind, considerate and helpful. When I wrote him he always answered, no matter how busy he was, and if his answer was delayed a few weeks, he apologized. A very fine person.

I can see his face in front of me, both from BayCon where I saw him last, and from the "Little Men" back in the early sixties. I thank him for the nice things he said to me, and wrote to me, and for the fine books he wrote. sf is flourishing in Israel, and I had some small part in that, and he encouraged me in that too.

By the way, he once said something like this, "The best work I ever produced was Astrid." At that time she was three years old. I haven't seen her since that time. Astrid is now married to excellent sf author Greg Bear, and they live in Seattle, Washington.

Review of a Book by Poul Anderson by Aharon Sheer
The Long Way Home by Poul Anderson (1955), 188 pages.

After learning that Poul had died I spotted this in the Paperback Gallery bookstore. I hadn't read it in 40 years, so I couldn't resist. It's typical Anderson in that there is both a scientific idea as the basis, and social commentary. Early in the 21st century a method of instantaneous transportation is discovered. But there are technical problems in directing it accurately. A robot spaceship is sent out to Pluto. Although it apparently gets there instantaneously, it misses Pluto by a considerable distance, and it takes quite a long time to find it. Then a small manned spaceship using the new, untried technology, is sent to explore distant stars. Three astronauts visit planets around stars as far as 1000 light years from earth, travelling altogether 5000 light years. But when they get back to earth, they discover that they are 5000 years in the future. The technology is well known in this future; it seems that the trip is instantaneous to those inside the ship, but in fact the ship makes its trip at the speed of light. On the test trip to Pluto they had thought that there was some inaccuracy in locating their target, but it seems that Pluto had simply moved....

Now comes the social comment. The hero of the book, astronaut Ed Langley, finds much to comment on. The future earth has tens of billions of people, living in huge towers and in underground warrens. The higher your social status, the higher up you get to live. The lowest levels are inhabited by the Commons, who have an IQ of about 90. The highest levels, the Ministerial class, have an IQ closer to 150. As travelers from the past, the astronauts are up high in the towers. Earth is run by an enormous computer, fair but unimaginative. Cloning (not called that in the book), and genetic engineering, provide identical, strong, capable police, guards and soldiers, all of whom look alike. The status of women is low. A well-to-do man can purchase an intelligent woman slave, one who has been engineered and conditioned to be the perfect companion and servant, happy with her duties and her man. Ex-American Langley is not happy with this future earth.

Science, Anderson tells us, has discovered everything there is to know. Art and music and literature have long been repeating themselves. "Back in the Twenty-first Century, masters' theses about the commas in Shakespeare had still been a subject for humor – today the equivalent was a matter of course." (p. 151) "For the ordinary man, instability – change – means dislocation, war, uncertainty, misery, and death." (p. 152)

Other planets around other stars have been colonized. Because of the long time required to go from one planet to another (even at light speed), each of the planets is independent, and each has developed its own life style. A planet around Alpha Centauri, the closest star to earth and only four light years away, has a feudalistic society. Either you own your own land there, or you work on someone's land. There they still have nature and out-of-doors. There are still horses that one can ride. But even this planet has not avoided stagnation. It is one of the few that still have regular contact with earth.

The third society is one of interstellar traders – called the "Commercial Society". They travel between stars instantaneously, but years have passed by the time they get there, and years more before they go home. So really their society is each other – those that they travel with on their ships. No long-term contact is possible with planet dwellers. This form of life sounds more congenial to astronaut Langley. While the Society mostly limits itself to about a hundred light years of travel, there is still the possibility of taking off in unexpected directions, exploring new worlds.

Naturally, discussions with people of the future provide Anderson with the opportunity to give his opinions – in the mouth of his hero. Here is a discussion with an earth historian:

"The universe is bigger than we are," [Langley] said. "We can always find something new out there, always make a fresh start."

"Are you thinking of the lost colonies?" asked [historian] Mardos. He snorted. "...they were only people who couldn't make the grade at home and tried to escape. I doubt if they did any better out there."

[Langley replied] "[Take] the Americans themselves, my own people. Some of them were religious dissenters who couldn't get along with the churches at home. Some of them were deported criminals. The later immigrants were mostly impoverished bums, some few liberals who didn't like what was happening in Europe. And yet this bunch of malcontents and Commoners took over half a continent, gave republican government its first real start, led the parade in creating industry and

technology, and grabbed the leadership in world affairs....” (p. 153)

The book has two kinds of aliens – and Anderson was pretty good at describing alien thought processes. And finally, it is an adventure story, and a puzzle, with twists and

turns, and the hero only finds out at the end who the villains are.

Interestingly, a much more recent book presents some very similar social ideas. In *Starfarers* (1998) there is a society of interstellar traders who travel at nearly the speed of light, and are cut off from life on the planets. Anderson obviously favored this idea!

A Survey of the State of sf in Israel in the Last Five Years (Part 1)

By Eli Eshed, sf historian

Since 1997 there have been some important developments in the area of original Israeli sf. It cannot be said that more original sf books are coming out than in the past. Original sf and fantasy genre novels are certainly not successful compared to other popular genres such as thrillers and spy novels. From the point of view of most publishers and editors, sf and fantasy remain completely exotic genres that one prefers not to be involved with.

Where original Hebrew *genre* sf is blooming is on the Internet, where rapidly increasing numbers of stories produce immediate responses from readers. Several writers with real potential are beginning to stand out. However, this review will deal only with conventionally published works.

In recent years sf and fantasy motifs have appeared frequently in Hebrew *mainstream* literature. One of the younger and most popular writers in Israel is Etgar Karet. His collections of short stories have received acclaim both critically and popularly, and have been followed by a wave of imitations. Karet is a confirmed sf fan, and has written several fantasy stories. In truth, most of his stories have a fantastic, surrealistic atmosphere.

The same is true for another important writer, Orly Castel-Bloom. Her book *Dolly City* (Zamora Bitan Modan, 1992) gives a surrealistic picture of a future anarchistic Israel. Her book *HaMina Lisa [The Mina Lisa]* (Keter, 1996) describes a woman who moves to an alternate world. Both have strong elements of surrealistic fantastic post modernism.

One of the bestsellers in Hebrew literature in recent years, Yochi Brandes' *L'Chabot et HaAhava [Turn off the Love]* (Yediot Aharonot, 2000), deals among other things with the creation of an artificial dog (“Golem”) via magical incantations. However, in the many critical reviews of this book little note was taken of the strong fantastic elements in it.

Another book which included some declared sf stories and joined the bestseller list was Manuela Dviri's *Beitzim shel Shokolad [Luovo di Cioccolata] [Chocolate Eggs]* (Yediot Aharonot, 2000). Her book included the subjects of Kabalah, and the future of the State of Israel, in the form of sf short stories. It concluded with a story of a cabalist who brings peace and utopia to the world. These stories spoke to the hearts of many readers. (In Israel there is today a very strong interest in Kabalah and mysticism.)

Ultra-Orthodox Future

Naturally many sf stories prefer to deal with subjects of current political interest, and with current worries. One such is the fear that the rapidly growing Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community will become the majority and turn Israel into a fundamentalist religious state.

One such book is *B'Shem Shamayim [For Heaven's Sake]* (Am Oved, 1998), by Hedi Ben-Amar. She tells the history of a kibbutz family in the years 1997-2010 as Israel turns into a fundamentalist Jewish state.

An extreme example of the use of this fear is by Daniel Dotan, a central figure in anti-religious circles in Israel. His book *Anarchia Motek [Anarchy, Honey]* (HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 1999), is an anthology including several sf stories. One such is “Ahi HaDigitali” [“My Digital Brother”] about a man who creates a digital twin for himself. Another is the extremely dystopic title story “Anarchia Motek” about a future in which fundamentalists control the country in a violent and murderous way, and an underground of anarchist women fights them. This story, filled with blood and violence, more than any other story, is an extreme expression of the various anti-religious fears of an Ultra-Orthodox take-over. The best book in this genre, inasmuch as it does not go to extremes of hatred and tries to see things from the other side too, is Barry Prigat's *HaAretz HaMuvtahat [The Promised Land]* (Hed Artzi, 1999). His book tells of a Jewish ghetto in a future in which the Arabs control Israel and much of the rest of the world. The story takes place entirely in the ghetto, whose residents mostly are completely unaware of the outside world, until one of them runs away and discovers what the surrounding world is

like.... This story is reminiscent, and apparently not by accident, of Brian Aldiss' book *Non-Stop* (American title *Starship*).

Ultra-Orthodox sf

Surprisingly, there are also sf books from the other side, written by Ultra-Orthodox writers such as Shmuel Argaman and M. Arbel, which present the Orthodox Jewish viewpoint in thrillers with strong sf elements. *T'kala b'Hallal [Failure in Space]* (2000) by Argaman describes an alternate present in which the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviets continued to the end of the 20th century, especially in space exploration. In these books Ultra-Orthodox heroes with astounding scientific talents, or great bravery, bring victory against the forces of evil. The genre of thrillers has become very popular in Ultra-Orthodox literature.

The Battle with the Arabs

Another topic, which arouses ever-greater interest, is the question of Israel's relations with the Arabs, and in particular with the Palestinians, a subject which is today at the center of interest in Israeli society. Israel is at war with the Palestinians as these lines are written. There was a period of several years with little interest in this topic, since it appeared that Israel was moving steadily toward peace with the Arabs. It is likely that this subject will now develop strongly. Numerous apocalyptic sf stories have appeared recently on the Internet on the possibility of war between Israel and the Arabs.

A somewhat prophetic book was *Ketz HaMillenium [End of the Millenium]* by Dov Fuchs (1998), which describes how Israeli fanatics try to destroy the Temple Mount (where the Al-Aktza Mosque is located) in 1999, and as a result the entire Muslim world unites against Israel.

Shlomo Eriel's *Diplomatia b'Ma'amakei HaYam [Submarine Diplomacy]* (Hed Artzi, 2000) is a political and military thriller about the State of Israel and its battle with the State of Palestine in 2004. More books of this nature can be expected in the near future.

Dystopic and apocalyptic sf books are the norm. For example, Yael Yisrael's *Sof Sof [At Last]* (Hargol, 2000) is on a dystopic future Tel Aviv in which reading books is forbidden. It received much critical attention from mainstream reviewers who found the idea astounding, but it cannot be said that it had much new in it as an sf book.

Genre sf Novels

Standard genre sf novels appear which do not deal with Israel's unique problems, but they are few, and they arouse little critical interest. *Isha Zara [Mirror Me]* by Shlomo Leniado (Yediot Aharonot, 1999), is about a man who finds himself in a parallel world, and tries to return to his original world and life. This book was written by a well-known doctor and was almost a bestseller, but the publisher insisted that it was neither sf nor fantasy. Another example is Agat Yael Bar's *Masa HaKarkur Over Col Gvul [The Karkur Voyage Overdid It]* (G'vanim 2001). An explosion at the start of the 21st century divides mankind into separate bubbles in each of which a different society develops convinced that they are the last survivors.

A Flowering of Short sf Stories

Short sf stories are today far more popular than full-length novels. It's easier to publish them in the Internet or as anthologies. This has become a big fad thanks to the success of Etgar Karet. Many of his imitators include sf and fantasy stories in their collections.

The most interesting collection devoted entirely to sf, and one of the best Hebrew sf books ever written, is by well-known author Gayil Hareven. Her book *HaDerech l'Gan Eden [The Way to Heaven]* (Keter, 1999) is a collection of short stories devoted to the possible affects of genetic engineering and cloning on people's lives.

Another interesting book is by philosopher and sf editor Addy Zemach. His collection *Kolot Zarim [Alien Voices]* (HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 2000) includes some outstanding stories, although most are not sf. One is a description of the creation from the point of view of the god who dreams it. Another is a humorous story which describes the efforts of earth's representative to the Galactic Council to find *something* which would symbolize the earth, which he could use in a memorial service for the earth, after its destruction. A very successful story.

Other collections which include sf stories: Yanon Nir's *Pamayim Kavru et Berta [They Buried Berta Twice]* (Modan, 1998) which includes the story "Lo Yadati sheyesh Li Ahot" ["I Didn't Know I Had a Sister"] about a man whose parents cloned themselves and him. Yuval Yerah's *HaHoshek: Sipurim [The Desirer: Stories]* (Halonot, 2000) has stories on a depressing technological world in which new inventions change the lives of the helpless population. Shlomi Sason's *Teivat HaHazit [The*

Hallucination Box] (Cherikover, 2000) includes two sf stories: "V'oolai B'chlal Zeh Haya Ken" ["Maybe It Was That Way"], and "Tolaei Shnat 2031" ["The Worms of 2031"].

Sf Poetry

A developing field is sf poetry. Well-known Israeli poet David Avidan wrote such poems in the 70s and 80s. Today the central figure (but definitely not the only one) is Shlomo Shoval. His book *B'Medinot HaShamyim [Nations of the Sky]* (HaKibbutz HaMeuhad, 1998) is a collection of short prose poems on sf subjects, which seem to be ideas for short stories. The very shortness of these poems leaves the reader wanting "more".

A second book by Shoval, *Lama HaAbamim Tassim b'Derech Clal b'Shloshot u'Madua HaHaizarim Lo Ohavim Lhitztalem [Why UFOs Usually Fly in Threes and Why Aliens Don't Like to Have Their Picture Taken?]* (Carmel, 2000), presents the impressions of an alien visiting the earth, and contains numerous poems and humorous essays.

Sf for Children and Young Adults

One of the most famous sf series for children is the long-running series (since 1961) by "Ohn Sarig" (Shraga Gafni) on the adventures of an invisible boy, *Dani Din*. In recent years "Sarig" wrote a trilogy (1996-1998) in this series in which Dani Din, and his invisible girl cousin Dina Din, fight aliens who are planning an invasion of the earth. Among other things the Dins rescue U.S. president Bill Clinton from the aliens, fight Hamas terrorists, and carry out a space battle in which they succeed in destroying most of the alien space fleet!

In response to the great interest which appeared in the 90s with regard to UFOs and aliens, Yoram Mark-Reich wrote a novel for young adults, *Mavet b'Rishon l'April [Death on the First of April]* (Sha'al, 1997), on the kidnapping of children by murderous aliens. This was just one of a stream of novels dealing with aliens and UFOs. Another was Tamar Borenstein Lazar's *Kofiko HaHaizar [Kofiko the Alien]* (Danny S'farim, 1999-2000).

Barry Prigat (popular author of *HaAretz HaMuvtahat* mentioned above) wrote *Millimeter* (Danny S'farim, 1999-2000), a series of thrillers for children about a girl who uses her magic ring to fight against a mad scientist. In each book, the villain plans to take over the world using a new invention for his giant robot.

Another series by Prigat is *Keren Alpha [The Alpha Corner]* (Dani, 2000) which deals with the virtual adventures of a girl inside various computer worlds.

A very different series, *Minheret HaZman [Time Tunnel]*, by excellent children's author Galila Ron Feder, describes the adventures of children who travel by a time tunnel. In each book they go back to an event in the history of the State of Israel, from the State's establishment in 1948 up to the bringing of Ethiopian Jews to Israel in the 80s. Since 1997 fourteen books have appeared in this series published by Modan. The first in the series, for example, was *Time Tunnel I: Jerusalem Besieged*.

Fantasy

In current Hebrew literature we find more and more fantasy. Orly Toran's book *N'shikat HaMavet [Kiss of Death]* (Keter, 1999) is a sort of thriller in the style of Borges or Umberto Eco, about a fantastic, surrealistic, mysterious city.

Orly Ardon's *HaMuza v'HaMahshev Sela [The Muse and Her Computer]* (Carmel 2000) is about a muse that sneaks into a story she is writing about an Israeli caricaturist.

Young author Michael Omer has written two charming humorous fantasy books in the style of Terry Pratchett and Douglas Adams, *HaGeographia shel Sof HaOlam [The Geography of the World's End]* (Opus, 1997) and *Mitkefet HaBarvaz [The Duck's Attack]* (Yaron Golan, 1999). Unfortunately these humorous fantasies have as yet no competitors in Hebrew literature.

Perhaps the most interesting is Amir Or's book *Shirat Tahira [The Song of Tahira]* (Hargol, 2001), a fantastic epic presented as if translated from the ancient Tukari language (including an appendix with quotes from imaginary researches on the epic). Her book is very reminiscent of actual epics such as the *Iliad* and the *Mahabarta* in its description of the relations between humans and gods in a distant heroic past.

(Eli's review will be concluded next month)

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| <p>Israeli Society for sf and Fantasy -- http://icon2001.sf-f.org.il ICON 2001 sf/fantasy Convention October 3-5 Hol HaMoed Succot Cinemateque Tel Aviv</p> |
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