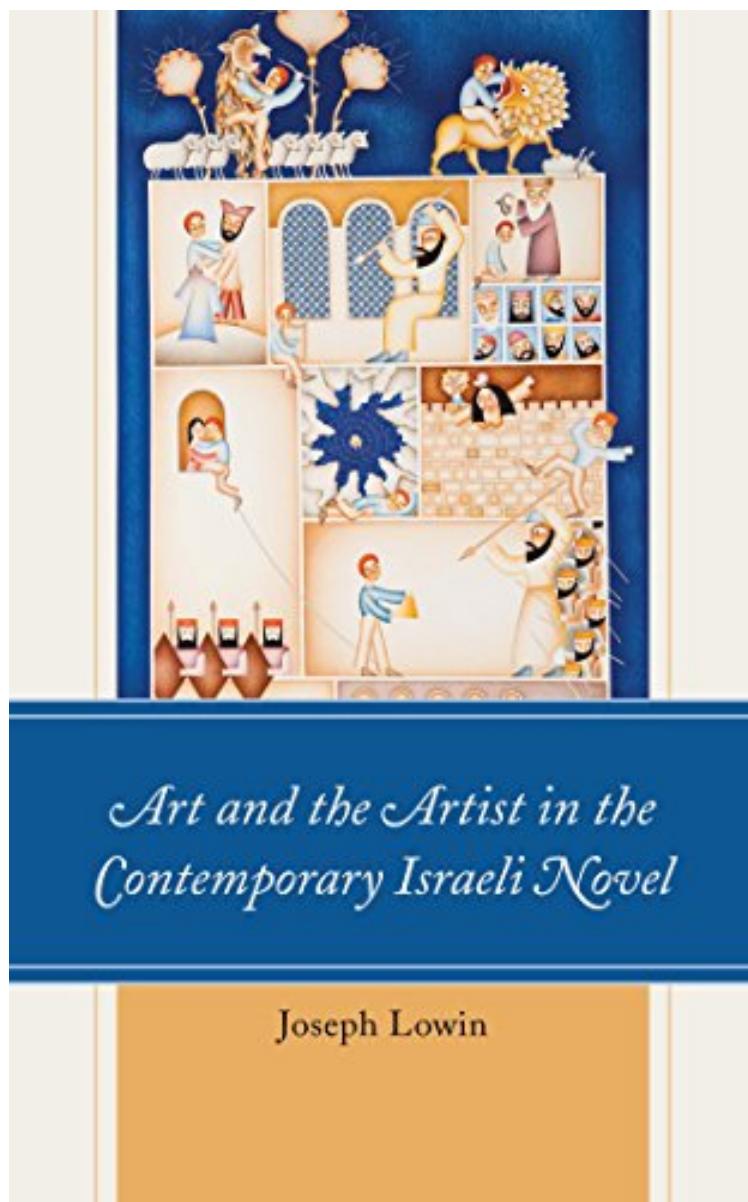


Art and the Artist in the Contemporary Israeli Novel: Aesthetic Israel

Joseph Lowin

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*Art and the Artist in the
Contemporary Israeli Novel*

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Joseph Lowin : Art and the Artist in the Contemporary Israeli Novel: Aesthetic Israel before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Art and the Artist in the Contemporary Israeli Novel: Aesthetic Israel:

Art and the Artist in the Contemporary Israeli Novel presents studies of eight contemporary works of Israeli fiction by eight major Israeli novelists. It deals with a society where drama, lived in reality but also in the mind, is a central moving force. What this book shows is the ways these texts deal with the themes of creativity and the creation of a work of art and with the way art and artists are portrayed in a culture that is often perceived as being otherwise preoccupied. The book involves close and painstaking readings of these novels and travels along a broad spectrum of themes. It also shows how these texts engage in dialogue with texts of the Jewish tradition, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, with each other. Two major points of the book are its emphasis on the work as literary art and the way the same themes often find their way into the varied works created by this literary generation. The book notes two tendencies among Israeli writers: that there is a great ldquo;urge to tellrdquo; their story and the story of Israel; and that to make clear not only what is ldquo;happeningrdquo; in these novels but also what is ldquo;going onrdquo; in their works of art, the novelist take the leisurely route of ldquo;literary emergingrdquo;mdash; slowly but surely leading the reader to see how art emerges from the most prosaic of events. Despite its easygoing tone, the book still claims to be a serious book, dealing with serious issues, both ethical and metaphysical. One of the cases this book endeavors to make is that one of the main goals of contemporary Israeli writers is to insert their works of artmdash;via a midrashic mode of writing in which previous texts are constantly being re-written and being made modernmdash;as links in the great chain of the Jewish textual tradition. These novels often refer back to biblical tales and to rabbinic ways of reading them. But they also demonstrate how the writers themselves and their books and are also a part of that tradition. Most of all, however, these writers are supremely aware that they are artists and that they have a particular responsibility to their art.

Art and the Artist in the Contemporary Israeli Novel [is] a signally rich, insightful and brilliantly analytical study. hellip; I instantly saw how (if I dare to put it so) it was meant for me. Or, more generally, for readers like me, who depend on translation of contemporary Hebrew literature, but thereby lack a critical context. hellip; [How] relieving it is that yoursquo;ve separated the novelists from their frequently contentious politics (Grossman, Oz). As you promise in your preface, you give us Aesthetic Israel. You also give us Aesthetic Lowin: your language has its own depth and power; like all superior criticism, your book is itself a work of literature. (Cynthia Ozick, author of *The Pagan Rabbi and Other Stories*)Art and the Artist in the Contemporary Israeli Novel is a highly original and beautifully written book. Each chapter provides a window into the work of a major Israeli novelist by way of an in-depth analysis of one of the novelistsrsquo;s works. The first chapter [on Aharon Appelfeldrsquo;s *The Age of Wonders*] hellip; is especially impressive. To my knowledge there is nothing quite like it in the extensive literature on this author. [Lowin] deals with complex issues in a lucid manner that I would characterize as brilliant. hellip; Each chapter in the book is a jewel in its own way. hellip; There is no other book that provides such brilliant companion analyses in one convenient place. hellip; The authorrsquo;s chapter on Megged is a tour de force.hellip; As one who wrote on Megged, I can say without reservation that this is the best treatment anywhere of this challenging novel [Mandrakes from the Holy Land], and it is a tribute to the under-appreciated Aharon Megged. This book could easily serve as a Primer in Israeli criticism. Its major contribution lies in its highly disciplined and eloquent exposition of the way in which ldquo;slow readingrdquo; can bring out the best in individual and highly complex and highly worthwhile Israeli novels. hellip;[The] book as a whole [is] a major contribution to the study of these and similar authors. There is no other book quite like this one. It will be useful for courses taught in both the original Hebrew and in translation. hellip; For me it has been an edifying and uplifting experience preparing this report. (Stanley Nash, Hebrew Union College)Joseph Lowin's close and brilliant readings of eight Israeli novels serves as a superb introduction to the country's greatest living writers, the issues that they grapple with, the language that they employ, and the textual tradition that they draw upon. A masterful guide to contemporary Israeli fiction in English. (Jonathan D. Sarna, Brandeis University)A highly readable and informed introduction to Israeli literature through eight novel studies for the general reader. Joseph Lowin traces the authors' discoveries of art and explorations of the creative process in daily life. Each work is celebrated for its contribution to the continuing revival of Hebrew and its connection to the larger republic of letters. (Nancy Berg, Washington University, St. Louis)About the AuthorJoseph Lowin is a retired professor of humanities living in New York City.