

MAGAZINE SECTION

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ISRAELI WRITER MICHAL GOVRIN'S award-winning 2002 novel, grounded in the country's history since statehood and in its contemporary reality, is newly available in English.

Reading this second novel by Tel-Aviv born Govrin, a writer, poet and theater director, who also holds a PhD, offers insights into the modern artistic creativity that is part of the country's vibrant arts scene, producing literary offerings, such as this one, that stand as international achievements.

Snapshots, by Michal Govrin, translated by Barbara Harshav (Riverhead Books, 2007, 322 pp., \$26.95) mingles history, politics, arts and culture to form a poetic and lyrical work. It is a story of love and loss, shot through with sharply conflicting visions and dissonant voices.

All this is wrapped up in the central character, Ilana Tsurriel, an internationally known, award-winning architect whose radical left-wing views spill over into her profession and latest architecture project, a joint Israeli-Palestinian monument to

peace that she wants to see built in Jerusalem. The chosen site is the Hill of Evil Counsel.

Capturing the sweep of Jewish history

The two guiding motifs of her utopian project are the sukkah, the temporary dwelling Jews create to remind them of the temporal nature of life, and the Sabbatical year (*shemittah*), when the land is "let go" to lie fallow.

The "huts" will be constructed in accordance with the differing stories and experiences of their builders, and all will co-exist.

It gives nothing away to reveal that Ilana dies in an

automobile accident — we learn this in the novel's opening paragraphs. Her life is then pieced together from the letters, journals, documents and photos that remain — the snapshots of the title — fragments that are assembled into a life.

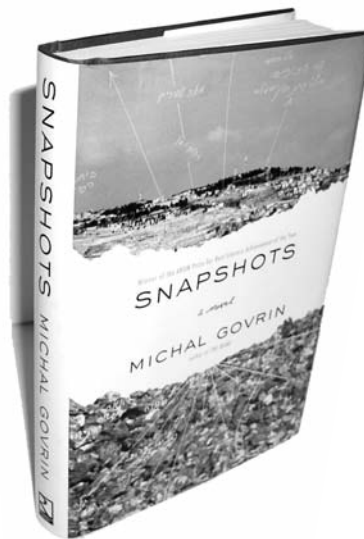
LANA'S FATHER, AARON Tsurriel, one of the country's Zionist pioneers, has died, and the present from which her life is reconstructed is the year of his death. It is also the year of the first Gulf War.

We learn about her past by way of the internal conversations she now has with her father as she continues to try to explain her life choices to him, and, it seems clear, to herself.

The past and the present, and the generations that inhabit them, are intertwined, as Ilana seeks to answer all the unasked questions and engage in the dialogues that can no longer take place.

Ilana and her father were very close, and in spite of her betrayal — Ilana leaves Israel, thereby,

in the eyes of her father, abandoning the Zionist dream, refusing to become the next generation to



build the land and thus fulfill his dream — the two remained close.

Instead of carrying on her father's story, as she explains in one of her internal conversations, she is driven by an opposing need: "Everything just to get as far away as possible from your story, Father. To live on the other side of the century, the story of our own wanderings."

Ilana, also called Ilanka (by her father and other family members) and Lana (mostly by her American, European and Palestinian friends) becomes again the wandering Diaspora Jew, living and working in New York, Paris and Jerusalem.

To round out the historical picture, Ilana is married to Alain, a scholar of the Holocaust as well as its survivor, "a citizen of places wiped out," as she describes him.

He shares none of her vision of peace between Israelis and Palestinians. Their troubled marriage is ending as the story begins, with their two young sons — David and Jonathan — feeling the effects of it all.

The contemporary picture is filled out by Ilana's love affair with Sayyid, a Palestinian who heads a theatrical troupe working on her project.

Their relationship is a metaphor for the view that the victor, by virtue of being victorious, is the cause of all conflict between them.

It is also a metaphor for how each side approaches

the other.

To Ilana, Sayyid as "the other" is irresistible and she gives herself to him over and over, physically and emotionally. To Sayyid, Ilana is the conquest of the other, the ravishing of the victor by the vanquished.

When Ilana returns to Israel with her sons at the end of 1990, near the end of the year of mourning for her father, war is threatening.

This section of the book, with its descriptions of sealed rooms, gas masks, sirens and SCUDS, and the sheer terror of it all, are riveting. Govrin brings it all to life with an immediacy that makes heart-stopping reading.

The writing, true to its title, moves between short, descriptive lines to narrative passages, and from the impressionistic to the narrative, snapshots that comprise the albums of the lives Govrin presents.

SNAPSHOTS IS FILLED WITH allusions, references, symbols and metaphors, and feels overwritten in places. Govrin wants her characters to encapsulate the sweep of Jewish history, and they can be more symbolic than real at times.

That being said, Govrin is an immensely talented and intelligent writer, and we look forward to hearing much more from her. ■

The world must remember. We must never forget.

Kristallnacht

November 9 to 10, 1938

Night of Broken Glass


Almost 70 years ago, throughout Germany and Austria the Nazis unleashed a wave of terror against the people of the Jewish faith.

Thousands of Jewish homes, businesses and places of Jewish worship were burned and destroyed.

30,000 Jewish people were forced into concentration camps, countless others were beaten or killed.

This remembrance is made possible by a gift from the

Al Gruen Philanthropic Fund at the

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