Homeland or Holy Land? The "Canaanite" Critique of Israel  by James S. Diamond
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these and similar editorial infelicities, Oelman’s thorough analysis is a welcome addition to the growing literature on seventeenth-century Marrano authors.

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In the preface to this study of the “Canaanite” (or “Young Hebrews”) ideological movement which arose in Palestine in the 1940s, James S. Diamond raises a question that many readers with some knowledge of Zionist and Israeli history might ask: Why has he undertaken to study this movement, which he himself characterizes as “a footnote to the Zionist idea and the Israeli experience” (p. 120)? Its ideology was based on a questionable interpretation of Jewish history that posited an ancient entity of peoples known as the Hebrews (which included the Amorites, Moabites, Ammonites, Phoenicians, and Israelites), who were the original inhabitants of western Palestine. It called for the modern Zionist settlers of Palestine to reject the diaspora Jewish religious civilization that developed after the destruction of the First Temple and to reestablish the ancient Hebrew entity together with the other peoples of the region. As Diamond points out, Canaanism must be seen as a “heresy” (p. 2), for neither its historical interpretation nor its radical rejection of cultural ties with diaspora Jewry were ever widely accepted by the Jews of Israel or the diaspora.

Diamond explains that he has chosen to study Canaanism because, as the source of a heretical, radical critique of Zionism and of the State of Israel in its early years, it has much to tell us on a theoretical level about Zionism and Israel. Diamond views Canaanism, however, not only as a historically significant cultural and political movement that illuminates the nature of Zionism and Israel, but also as a set of ideas that might provide practical answers to issues preoccupying the State of Israel and its Jewish supporters in the diaspora. Having found both historical understanding and contemporary relevance in Canaanism, Diamond has set for himself the goal of maintaining in his book a balance between what he calls the “rigor” of
scholarship and what he calls the "passion" of personal involvement (p. xii). In keeping with Diamond's dual approach of scholarly rigor and personal involvement, I will evaluate both the author's scholarship and his ideas about the relevance of Canaanism for contemporary Israel.

Diamond approaches his scholarly analysis of Canaanism from a number of points of view: its relationship to Zionist thought, its development in the mind of its chief ideologue, the Hebrew post Yonatan Ratosh, and its role in contemporary Israeli politics and culture. In discussing its relationship to Zionist thought, Diamond links Canaanism to other expressions of opposition to the Zionist movement's attempts to blur the distinction between the traditional Jewish religious civilization and the secular Zionist revolution. It is the blurring of the distinction between the religious and the secular that has, according to Diamond, made Zionism so vulnerable to the critique of such disparate views as those of the Hebrew literary critic Baruch Kurzweil (the subject of an earlier study by Diamond), Neturei Karta, and Canaanism. What connects them in their critique of Zionism is their insistence that by not preserving the distinction between the religious and the secular, Zionism violates the integrity of both modes of Jewish existence. For Kurzweil and Neturei Karta, the preservation of the integrity of the traditional Jewish religious civilization is of primary concern, while for Canaanism, it is the preservation of the integrity of the secular Zionist revolution that is at stake.

As Diamond has so convincingly demonstrated, a movement such as Canaanism cannot be analyzed only in terms of its ideological differences with Zionism. To a large extent, it arose as the product of the personal development of its ideological leader, Yonatan Ratosh. Diamond traces how Ratosh developed from his origins as the son of a secular, European Jewish, Hebrew-speaking, Zionist family that settled in Palestine in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution to become the ideological leader of Canaanism. Diamond is judicious in his attempts to link the personal, psychological development of Ratosh with his Canaanite ideas. The one link he does suggest is based on Ratosh's declaration that as he grew up in the yishuv, he always felt estranged from it. As Diamond states:

It is unclear to me what the source for this sensibility was—whether we can ascribe it to an emerging poetic ego that needed to differentiate itself from the world in order to establish its voice, or whether there were other subjective and objective factors operating in the way Ratosh met the world, about which we
can only speculate. Ratosh himself always regarded the distinctive linguistic basis [as a child of one of the first Hebrew-speaking families of modern times] on which his early life rested as decisive. (p. 26)

Explicitly declining to undertake a “psychohistorical study” (p. 50) of Ratosh, Diamond does not engage in any further speculation on the psychological origins of Ratosh’s emerging Canaanite identity. Instead, Diamond analyzes this development as Ratosh’s attempt to understand the Jews’ and Arabs’ conflicting claims to Palestine and the control of Palestine by Britain in the 1930s and 1940s. Ratosh reached the conclusion that the conflict over the control of Palestine could be resolved only by expelling Britain from Palestine and replacing British rule with that of a sovereign Hebrew polity composed of the Jews and other native inhabitants of Palestine.

According to Diamond’s analysis, Ratosh’s ideas did not develop in isolation from the political and cultural trends of his time. His attitude toward British rule brought him into political alignment with the Revisionists and the Jewish terrorist organizations Etsel and Lehi that engaged in violent opposition to British rule. His ideas about a sovereign Hebrew polity were developed under the influence of the Semitics scholar A. G. Horon (originally named Adolphe Gourevitch), whom he met in Paris. Horon, whose theories were an outgrowth of European critical biblical scholarship, believed that there had existed a Hebrew entity in ancient times that included the Israelites as one of several peoples. This notion became the model for Ratosh’s dream of a revived Hebrew polity consisting of Jews and other peoples of Palestine.

Diamond complements his analysis of the personal contexts in which Ratosh developed Canaanism with an analysis of the content of Canaanite ideology. In Canaanite programmatic statements made before and after the founding of the State of Israel, Diamond discerns two fundamental qualities. One quality is a “nativist” conviction of the superiority of the new culture emerging in Palestine (p. 58), which must be seen in the context of the developing antagonism between the earliest Zionist settlers and the Jewish immigrants who had more recently arrived in Palestine. The other quality is a commitment to the principles of Western democracy (although at times the Canaanites appeared to be attracted to an authoritarian political model).

In the final part of his scholarly analysis of Canaanism, Diamond considers the interaction between Canaanite thinking and contemporary Israeli
political and cultural issues. Diamond demonstrates that while Canaanism never had a major impact on Israeli society, aspects of the Canaanite ideology were adapted by a number of Israeli figures in their formulations of positions on contemporary Israeli political issues. He illustrates this indirect influence of Canaanism on Israeli society by discussing how Canaanite-like political positions emerged in response to two issues that have preoccupied Israel throughout its history: the relationship between religion and state, and the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority. In one instance, the Canaanite insistence that traditional Jewish religion and secular Zionism be seen as distinct one from the other was translated into a public position when, in 1950, Ratosh's brother Uzi Ornan founded the League for the Abolition of Religious Coercion, which advocated—in opposition to developments in the early years of the state—a more clearly defined separation between religion and state in Israel. In another instance, the Canaanite claim of a natural link between the Jews and the other peoples of Palestine inspired Ratosh's disciple Aharon Amir to attempt to foster ties with the Arabs of the territories occupied by Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967 and with the Arabs of Lebanon in the aftermath of the Litani Operation of 1978 and during the period of the Lebanon War that began in 1982.

Diamond traces the presence of the spirit of Canaanism not only in certain Israeli political positions, but also in Israeli art and literature. He cites works of Israeli art and literature which, while not necessarily directly influenced by Canaanite ideology, do reflect its spirit. A more direct influence can be seen in the role Ratosh and his followers played in the development of contemporary Israeli literature. In line with his Canaanite ideology, Ratosh's literary theory distinguished between works of "Jewish" belles lettres, which reflect the world of diaspora Jewry, and works of "Hebrew" belles lettres, which reflect the world of the emerging Hebrew nation in Palestine (p. 109). Ratosh attempted to foster the development of this new "Hebrew" literature in his role as editor of the journal Alef in the early years of the state, and this attempt was subsequently taken over by Aharon Amir in his role as editor of the journal Keshet beginning in 1958.

Diamond has provided us with an excellent analysis of the development of Canaanism in the contexts of Zionist thought, the life of Yonatan Ratosh, and the history and politics of the yishuv. He also makes clear the extent to which Canaanism has continued either to influence or at least to reflect important issues of Israeli politics and culture, even while it has failed to sustain itself as a movement.
I would raise only one major objection to Diamond's approach. Diamond refuses to take seriously the mythopoetic element of Canaanism, which is present more in Ratosh's poetry (which Diamond does not analyze in his study) than in the ideological statements he was involved in composing (which are the focus of Diamond's study). Diamond declares that he sees Canaanism as more of "a political and social ideology" than "a literary-cultural phenomenon" (p. 5). In one passage, analyzing a programmatic statement by the Canaanites, Diamond asserts that this mythopoetic element was relatively unimportant in Canaanite thinking.

... it becomes clear that what Canaanism ultimately envisions has little, if anything, to do with the pagan past, polytheism, or archaism. When Ratosh and his associates finally spelled out their objectives, ancient Hebrew tribalism with all its values and culture turned out to be secondary, perhaps even window-dressing. It is only the very last point in the program that harks back to the past and this in a most undefined way, as if to supply some intellectual or emotional ballast to the larger conceptual framework it concludes. What is primary is very modern: the individual, his or her civil rights, a secular egalitarianism. (p. 67)

It may be true, as Diamond indicates, that the real strength and effectiveness of Canaanism was as a modern political ideology. And yet, Ratosh did publish Canaanite poetry based on his mythic view of the origins of the Hebrews in ancient times. Like all revolutionary ideologies, as radical as Canaanism was, it needed to find some kind of "emotional ballast" and confirmation for the radical break with the recent past by finding a model in the distant past. Even if that model did not work in the end for the vast majority of the yishuv and was not as essential to Canaanite thinking as is commonly assumed, more consideration of Canaanism's relationship to Ratosh's myth-making and poetry would have added an additional illuminating dimension to this very fine study of Ratosh's ideological thinking.

It is ironic that a diaspora Jewish scholar would find himself in such sympathy with the ideas of a man who sought to break the ties of the yishuv Jews with diaspora Jewry. Diamond finds the Canaanite ideology so attractive and relevant to contemporary needs because he believes that it provides a basis for Israel to resolve certain very difficult political issues. As Diamond sees it, too much of Israeli public policy derives from an assumption that Israel must be based partly or wholly on such basic elements of traditional Judaism as halakhah and the idea of the special covenental rela-
tionship between the Jews and God. From a democratic point of view, this assumption had led to an unacceptable degree of religious coercion by the state, which has aroused the resentment by secular Jewish Israelis of the Jewish religious establishment, and to a de facto acceptance of non-Jews as second-class citizens, which has aroused the resentment by the non-Jewish minorities of the Jewish majority. Canaanite thinking, Diamond believes, could lead to an Israeli commitment to a distinction between the State of Israel and traditional Judaism that would result in a more harmonious relationship between religious and secular Jews and between the Jewish majority and non-Jewish minorities in Israel.

Diamond is attracted to Canaanism for another reason as well. Canaanism, he believes, provides more of a positive evaluation of diaspora Jewry than does Zionism, which has sought to supplant diaspora Jewish culture, and than do many Israelis, who assume their Jewish cultural superiority over the Jews of the diaspora. By making a clear distinction between the secular national revival in Palestine, which Ratosh advocated, and the religious life of Jews in the diaspora, from which Ratosh thought the yishuv should sever its ties, Ratosh allowed for the continued existence of diaspora Jewish culture. In the words of Ratosh:

As far as we are concerned the Jews of America, France, or the Soviet Union and all the communities of Jews wherever they live are entitled to continue fostering the values of Judaism and to conserve and protect them. . . . Our relationship to Jews the world over is that of respect for foreigners. (p. 99)

I share Diamond’s concerns about the painful tensions that have been engendered by Zionism’s ambiguous identity as both a secular movement and an appropriator of the myths, values, and concepts of traditional Judaism. Israel’s endless political debates over the degree to which religion and state should be separated, the ambiguous status of Arabs in a Zionist state, the tension between Israeli Jews and diaspora Jews over whose existence is more legitimate have been a high price to pay for the establishment of the State of Israel. Nevertheless, to attempt to resolve these issues by reviving the notion of a separation between Judaism and Zionism that Canaanite ideology advocated might exact another price. The creative advantage of Zionism’s ambiguous identity lies in its potential to be transformed into a more clearly defined identity based on a synthesis between the past and the present, the diaspora and Zion, the secular and the religious.
The elimination of Zionism's ambiguities could prevent Israel from ever achieving such a synthesis, thereby greatly impoverishing its culture.

While I find it difficult to believe that Canaanism can make a positive contribution to Israel's efforts to solve its political and cultural problems, I agree with Diamond that Canaanism's extreme positions provide a very useful perspective on the nature of Zionism and of Israeli existence. In this study, therefore, Diamond has provided us not only with an excellent scholarly analysis of the Canaanite movement, but also with a fresh view of the underlying political and cultural agenda that Israel must face as it enters its fifth decade of existence.

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When David Hartman published his *Maimonides: Torah and Philosophic Quest*, I reviewed it, commenting that it was not so much a study in medieval theology as an essay in contemporary Orthodoxy (*Religious Studies Review* 5 [1979]:107–111). With his new book, *A Living Covenant*, Hartman has turned directly to the theme of modern theology. One may agree or disagree with his main theses, but one cannot contest that this is an important book in the articulation of contemporary Orthodox religious thought. Interestingly, his discussion with Maimonides in this book is a serious theological engagement (chapter 10 and particularly the Postscript, where Hartman lists his differences with the Rambam).1

1. In my review, I also criticized Hartman's evaluation of the mystical dimension in Maimonides. On page 120, with note 8, he acknowledges insufficient attention on his part to the "meta-halakhic experience" in Maimonides. He goes on to show that the halakhic-social-covenantal dimension of Judaism is basically the anthropocentric motif, while the contemplative-universal dimension is the theocentric motif. (This reappears in the two sources of love [pp. 266–267].) According to Hartman, Maimonides proposes that these motifs be held in tension, alternately in the mind. I think Hartman is correct about using these motifs *seriatim*, i.e., alternately. However, I do not think that is what Maimonides had in mind. In the *Guide for the Perplexed* (III:51), Maimonides uses the models of "I sleep but my heart waketh" and Abraham to indicate that, at its highest level, these motifs are held simultaneously, in double consciousness.