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The Heroes and the Flame*

Abstract

The poems of the Jewish poet Hanna Senesh bear witness to strong resolve and refusal to stand by without interference. Written mostly in Hebrew the words reflect a fusion of ancient as well as modern features of expression. She left her place of birth for what was to become the modern state of Israel, but did not stay in safety deciding instead to risk her life in order to bring hope to Jews in Hungary towards the end of the Second World War.

Keywords: Jewish literature, Hebrew literature, Hanna Senesh, Second World War, Jews in Hungary

It was a time of war, a time of uncertainty, of horror and fear. But not only that, it was also a time of heroism, kindness, and an opportunity for a change. It was a time for resistance.

Resistance as a noun is something that is connected to a group and in such a case there are always leaders or heroes or perhaps both.¹

Resistance however, is usually not only one single act but it is built upon several acts made by different people. Furthermore, according to the Oxford dictionary the first definition of resistance is “The refusal to accept or comply with something” and therefore

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¹ Resist by its definition can be connected to something that has to do with one’s daily life. It does not have to be an act or refusal to act by a group of people. One can resist alone to different things.

resistance does not necessarily include “the use of force or violence to oppose someone or something”.² However, in many cases resistance and violence go hand in hand.

The Second World War began in September 1939. Nevertheless, already by the 30.1.1933 when the Nazi movement came to power in Germany hard winds of change started to blow. These winds that influenced the whole world still exist.

Among the many affected by the changes were the Jews; and not only the Jews of Germany but mainly, although not solely, the Jews of Europe.³ In 1941 mass exterminations of the Jews began. Parallel to the German occupation and the murders, the resistance bloomed.

This resistance had many faces and aspects. However, one thing can be traced among all the instances of resistance during the Second World War – The aim was first and foremost to struggle for life, and moreover, to struggle for life in freedom.

One of the instances of resistance during that time was the following:

In March 1944 a group of people parachuted and landed on Yugoslavian ground. It was not the first time that a group of paratroopers landed behind the lines of Nazi occupied territories in Europe. It was not the last time either.

For this paper however, this time has a special importance because it indicates the beginning of the last stage in the life of two members of the group, one of them – Hannah Senesh (Anikó Szenes), was also a Hebrew poet. This was the beginning of their end but not the end of the cause for which they sacrificed their life.

In this paper the actions and sacrifices of some members of these groups of parachutes, who were only a small but very important part of the resistance against the Nazis during the Second World War, will be examined through the poems written by one of the individuals belonged to this group, a young woman, Hannah Senesh.

This paper will examine some poems of hers written before and during her coming back to the land in which she was born – Hungary – trying to accomplish a mission that she volunteered for. Through these poems we will study three aspects connected to her life and the lives of the other people in this group; the motives for their willingness to participate in such actions, the limits to which they were willing to go, and their feelings concerning these actions.

The poems will be given both in their languages of origin and with a translation into English. The texts will be represented and discussed in the chronological order in which they were written by Hannah.⁴

² Resistance, *Oxford Dictionary*, http://oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/resistance.

³ Jews were in risk of life not only in Europe. The Nazis and their collaborators reached also the continent of Africa; among others the Jews of Libya were gathered in camps. For further reading on the Jews in Libya under WWII see Renzo De Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land-Libya 1985–1970*, University of Texas Press, Texas 1985; Irit Avramsky-Bley, *The Jewish Communities in Spain and the East in WWII and during the Holocaust*, Yad VaShem, Jerusalem 1992 (in Hebrew); Yaakov Hagag-Liluf, *The Jews of Libya in the period of WWII under the Nazi Regime*, World Organization for Libyan Jews, Or Yehuda 2003; and Maurice M. Roumani, *The Jews of Libya; Co existence, Presecution, Resettlement*, Sussex Academic Press, Sussex 2009.

⁴ The translations of the poems with the exception of the last one are all mine. The translation of the last poem, originally written in Hungarian, was made by Peter Hay, *Ordinary Heroes: The Life and Death of Chana Szenes, Israel's National Heroine*, Paragon House, New York 1989.

במדורות מלחמה⁵

במדורות מלחמה, בדלקה, בשרפה,
 בין ימים סוערים של הדם,
 הנני מבעירה פנסי הקטן,
 לחפש, לחפש בן אדם.

שלהבות השריפה מדעיכות פנסי,
 אור האש מסנוור את עיני;
 איך אביט, איך אראה, איך אדע איך אפיר,
 כשהוא יעמוד לפני?

תן סימן, אלוהים, תן סימן על מצחו,
 כי באש, בדלקה ובדם,
 כן אפיר את הזיק הטהור, הנצחי
 את אשר היפשתיו: בן אדם.

נ הלל 11.10.1940

In the fires of war

In the fires of war, in the burning, in the fire,
 among stormy days of the blood,
 here I am lighting my little torch,
 in order to search, to search for a human being.

The flames of the fire fade my torch,
 the fire-glow blinds my eyes;
 How will I look, how will I see, how will I know to recognize,
 When he will stand before me?

Set a sign, O Lord, set a sign on his forehead,
 because in the fire, the flare and the blood,
 surely I will know the pure, the eternal spark
 of what I was seeking: a human being.

(Nahalal 11.10.1940)

⁵ This poem that was found in Hanna Senesh's diary was the first poem written by her in Hebrew. This information is given by the Hanna Senesh Legacy Foundation on 26.02.2013.

The poem is built of three stanzas each of which includes four lines. The light-motive of this poem consists of light and fire. The poem begins with descriptions of war, in which the poet uses words to define fire and blood. Here the fire does not cause a positive light, but rather darkness as opposed to the light of the torch that is used to light up the way and is used as help when looking for a human being.

In the second stanza there is an expansion of the description of the lights of war. The fires of war fade the light that comes from the torch and their lights make the speaker blind. As the fires of wars cause the blindness of many people when they stop being able to make difference between right and wrong. The speaker is worried that she will not be able to see or recognize what she is looking for even when it will be right in front of her.

In the third and last stanza the speaker asks God for a sign on the forehead of this human being in order for her to recognize him among the fires and the blood. Here the poet uses a well-known element from the Old Testament in which God marked Cain who killed his brother with a mark on his forehead and forced him to wander around with no land of his own. In this poem, however, the mark on the forehead is meant to be used in order to mark the human being who can help humanity and the speaker herself from distraction. Furthermore, "Human being" in Hebrew is called "Son of Adam" and, as we know from the Old Testament, Adam had two sons. Because Abel was murdered, the speaker is looking after the one who was left alive, "Cain", although he in the story of the Old Testament murdered his brother she is sure that his deeds are much better than the horrors that people have to confront in her life time.

All throughout the poem there is a contradiction between the huge fire that usually symbolizes light but in this poem symbolizes darkness, and the little torch with its light that symbolizes a spark of hope and enlightenment with which the speaker wishes to find a human being, this one soul, this spirit of man in which she believes so much. The speaker wonders how she is going to recognize this human being among all the beastly humans, among all the hatred and the hostility and evilness.

The poem was written in 1940, during the Second World War, a year after the poet came to Israel from Europe. Even while the horrors continue, the speaker still believes that not all mankind has turned to evil, but rather somewhere salvation will be found even though now it is hard for her to see it.

This hope and longing not only for a better life but to life itself is something mutual to all the paratroopers who volunteered to return to hell on Earth, putting their lives at risk and even sacrificing them-selves in hope that their torch will help others to find their salvation and by this perhaps even to save all humanity. Most of the paratroopers were meant to come back to the country of origin and by this to their private hell from which they managed to get out while the lives of many of their dear ones has been stopped to exist.

למות

לְמוֹת צְעִירָה, לְמוֹת לֹא רְצִיתִי,
 אֶהְבֵּתִי אֶת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ הַחֹמָה,
 הָאוֹר, הַשִּׁיר, נִיצוֹץ שֶׁל זֶגַג עֵינַיִם –
 וְלֹא רְצִיתִי, לֹא רְצִיתִי הֶרֶס, מִלְחָמָה.

לֹא, לֹא רְצִיתִי, אִךְ אִם נִגְזַר עָלַי לְחַיּוֹת
 הַיּוֹם בְּשֶׁפֶךְ דָּם, בְּהֶרֶס הָאֵיִם לְחַיּוֹת
 אֶגִּיד בְּרוּךְ הַשֵּׁם בְּעֵד הַזְּכוּת לְחַיּוֹת
 לְחַיּוֹת, וּבּוֹא תְּבוֹא שְׁעָה לְמוֹת, לְמוֹת –
 עַל אֲדַמְתְּךָ, אֲרָצִי, עַל אֲדַמְתְּךָ אֲרָצִי, מוֹלְדֹתִי!

(נהלל 5.5.1941)

To Die

To die so young, to die I did not wish.
 I loved the warm sun,
 the light, the song, the spark of a pair of eyes –
 And I did not wish, I did not wish for distraction, war.

No, I did not wish, but if I have been sentenced to live,
 today in the pouring blood, in the terrible destruction, to live,
 I will say blessed is God for the right to live
 to live, and there will come a time to die, to die –
 Upon your soil, my land, upon your soil my land, my homeland!

(Nahalal 1941)

This poem describes Senesh's deeper thoughts during her first period of time in Israel as a young woman in the beginning of the Second World War, with great enthusiasm to build a home for her and for the Jews wherever they are, but at the same time she was still worried for her beloved ones who were left behind and whom she feared she will never meet again.

She, as other young men and women all around the world, wished to live happily, enjoying life. Nevertheless, already from the first line of this poem it seems that even before she knew for sure that she is going to return to the occupied territories of Europe and Hungary she had thoughts about death, as she writes: "To die so young... I did not wish".

However, in the second stanza one can clearly see the inner process she went through of accepting the reality and destiny to come. She says that she is grateful for the opportunity to live. This opportunity was denied from so many Jews and also non-Jewish people during that period of time and although she was so young she could realize the greatness of life as it was given to her and the sorrow and death and of life in its shadow: “Today in pouring blood, in the terrible destruction, to live”.

She came to accept that even though she wished to live like every other youngster does, because of the terrible events not only that her life will never be as she may have dreamed of when she was a little girl but also that death is not that far from coming. Her great consolation is in the thought that she will die upon her land which she considered also as her homeland – Israel.

She, after all, did not die in Israel but rather died for her beliefs, killed while trying to help Jews in occupied Hungary, prosecuted for treason in Hungary, something that many years later she was acquitted from.

The thoughts expressed here are to be found also in other texts that she wrote, especially in her diary.⁶ They also reflect the feelings that many of the paratroopers who volunteered to different missions of rescue behind the Nazi lines have had.

Upon coming to the last lines of the poem: “To die upon your soil, my land, upon your soil my land, my homeland!” we can taste the grotesqueness of life.

According to this poem her greatest consolation was that though she did not live the life she wished for, she will be able to die in the place she loved and called “my land”. Nevertheless, she died a painful death in the place that disappointed her most of all with the cruelty of its leaders. This was the place in which she was born.

The next text was written about 18 months after the previous one. In the period of time that passed between the writings of these two poems the life of Hannah, also, passed several changes, as for example the changing of the place of living and with it the group of people she lived with.

Not only she and her private life went through changes. Also the Yishuv in Israel went through changes, and of course the Nazi occupation expanded and the Second World War with it.

הליכה לקיסריה

אֵלַי, אֵלַי
שְׁלֵא יִגְמַר לְעוֹלָם
הַחֹל וְהַיָּם,
רְשָׁרוּשׁ שֶׁל הַמַּיִם,
בְּרַק הַשָּׁמַיִם,
תְּפִלַּת הָאָדָם

⁶ Her diary was published in Hebrew in 1966: *Hannah Senesh – Her Life and Diary*, Schocken Publishing House, Tel Aviv 1966.

Another version:

אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי
שֶׁלֹא יִפְסַק לְעוֹלָם
הַחוּל וְהַיָּם

וְמִזוּם הַמַּיִם
בְּרֵק הַשָּׁמַיִם
הָאֱמוּנָה בְּאָדָם

24.11.1942 (שדות ים קיסריה)

A walk to Caesarea

My God, my God
may that it will never end
the sand and the sea,
the rustle of the water,
the lightning of the sky,
the prayer of the human being

(Caesarea 1942)

Another version:

My God, my God
may that it will never stop
the sand and the sea,
the humming of the water,
The lightning of the sky,
the faith in the human being

Eli Eli is a one stanza poem built of six very short lines. The desire to keep on living that we met in the previous text, appears once more. Rather at the side the writer expresses a feeling that perhaps things will never be the same as they were once again, or, even as they are in the moment of the writing of this text.

The poem is also called “A Walk to Caesarea” but its popular name *Eli Eli* means “My God, My God”. The duplication of “My God” is to be found in *Psalms 22:2* but there it is found in the sense of ‘crying to God’ because the speaker thinks that God left him. In this poem however there is a wishful thinking that God will continue to preserve

what he has created. This poem can be understood as a simple pray of a human-being that there will be continuity for the life of mankind and nature.

The sights that the speaker describes in this poem, the sound of the waves, and the blue skies were occasional sights to the one who walked from kibbutz Sdot-Yam in which Hannah Senesh dwelt during this period all the way to Caesarea.

Two versions of this poem have been found and I chose to present both of them here although it is probably the version written on top that is the original version or at least the version that the poet herself chose to keep to since this is the version that was found in the collection of poems she left behind before she went to her parachuting mission.

The second version was published in the periodical "Yam" in 1945. Another possibility is that Hannah wrote these two versions and left them as they were because she, like other poets, could not make up her mind which one of the versions that was preferable for her.

During the period of time when she lived in kibbutz Sdot-Yam the great majority of the poems she wrote included the theme of the nature and the beauty of Israel, especially of the Galilee or the coast of the area where she lived. Such poems have been written also previous to her period in Sdot-Yam when she was still in Nahalal. However in this period of her life she did not produce an abundance of such poems. An example for such poems is "Poetry to Galilee" that starts with the words: "Your Mountains, Galilee, are everything". These descriptions of nature are to be found not only in the request the speaker had to God in the poem "A Walk to Caesarea" but also in "One Minute"; "Caesarea"; and "Genosar".

This poem is powerful in its simplicity. A human being is walking on the shores of a great sea and admiring the creation of God. And from the bottom of her (his) heart wishes that there will be no end to all this beauty. In times of desperation nature of the human being is to look for something bigger that hopefully has the power to bring salvation and comfort. In this case Hanna Senesh, through her written words, asks God to take care of things he created. First of all to save the world we are living in but also to preserve the hope of the ones who live in it. She actually follows the order of creation found in the *Old Testament* in the book of *Genesis*, and puts the human being at the end.

קול קרא

קול קרא והלכתי,
הלכתי כי קרא הקול.
הלכתי לבל אפול,
אך על פְּרֶשֶׁת דְּרָכִים
סַתְמַתִּי אֲזוּנֵי בַלּוֹבֵן הַקָּר
וּבְכִיתִי כִּי אֲבַדְתִּי דְבָר.

A voice called

A voice called and I went.
 I went because the voice called.
 I went in order not to fall.
 But at the crossroads
 I sealed my ears with the white frost
 and cried,
 for what I had lost.

(Sdot-Yam, Caesarea, 12. 1942)

The poem “A Voice Called” was written in Hebrew by Hannah Senesh in December 1942 in Kibbutz Sdot-Yam next to Caesarea.⁷ It is built from only one stanza that includes seven lines, five of them have three words, one has four words and one has one word only: “I cried”. This poem describes the way she felt at this period of her life. It was about three years after she came to Israel and about a year after she left Nahalal. It was also a few months before she volunteered to the British Army as a paratrooper.

“A Voice Called” describes the determination in spirit of the speaker when she heard an inner voice calling her to go in a certain path. The second line of this stanza poem both emphasizes the reason for the first steps on the new path of life- the inner voice that does not let her rest until she does what she feels she must. However the second line is no longer so determined as the first one. From “a voice called and I went” it is entirely remade in the stanza to become “I went because the voice called”. There is still a very strong sense of a mission. But she is not searching for it. It calls her.

The first two lines supposedly repeat themselves. The use of the same words causes this allusion. However, the change in the order of these words makes a big difference in the meaning of the sentence as a whole. In the first line “A voice has called and I went” the speaker presents the voice as leading her in the paths of life. The voice is the main issue and she follows it. On the second line, the meaning becomes explanatory. The speaker tries in some way to excuse her actions. She went because the voice has called, and all she did was to go.

It was not a completely logical and thought-through decision for her to make. It was made because of a voice, an inner voice that was calling her to go and as long as she did not go, it would not stop bothering her. She went in order not to fall into another possible path, the end of which was unknown to her at that time. But upon coming to a new crossroad she finally realized that by choosing this path in life, she lost other things that perhaps she had not thought about when starting on her new way. Among the things she lost was the “old her”. The person she once was had disappeared, never to return. And she came to realize the size of the sacrifice she made while going in this certain way up to the coming to the crossroads. There she had to decide which path to choose.

⁷ However it was published first only in H. Senesh, *Lelo Safa-Shirim*, Hakibuts Hameuchad 1978, p. 20.

Her way starts with the giving in to an inner voice that told her to go. She went without knowing to where this way would eventually lead her and not the path itself, but upon coming to the crossroad she had to make a decision about the way. This decision was about to be crucial not only concerning the path itself but also for the final destination. All these elements are clearly found in the circle of stories of Abraham in the book of *Genesis*.

In her real life the poet actually went in a new way in which she left one country for another. She left Hungary in order to fulfill her wish, her cause, to live in a Jewish land and to practice Zionism. However, she still felt that something was not complete. Things turned out to be less different than she thought they would be. Something was missing. Furthermore, there were people who were very close to her and whom she left behind upon coming to Israel. And there was nothing to compensate for their absence and the loss of contact with them. Her emotional connection to the people she left behind may be traced in some of her poems, as for example "Mothers in the Diaspora" written in Sdot-Yam on 18.5.1942, and the poem she wrote about her wish to meet her brother "If You were Coming" (Sdot-Yam 5.3.1942). This feeling of loss is emphasized also in the poem "On the Crossroads".

While achieving one goal and a new way of life she also lost much from her life left behind. Sometimes her feelings of loneliness increased as expressed by the poems "Loneliness" and "You're not alone". In these periods her longing for her beloved ones increased.

Until, one day, she decided to make a difference. When the situation in Europe became even worse than it was, Hannah volunteered to the Haganah and received training for a possible future mission. In January 1944 she was sent to Cairo with other volunteers to parachute missions. At this time she wrote the poem "We gathered Flowers".

Of the poems known to be written by Hannah Senesh three were written during her period of mission: "We Gathered Flowers", "Blessed is the Match", and "One-Two-Three". Her thoughts, feelings, desires and fears during this period when her death was waiting behind the corner are reflected in these poems:

לקטנו פרחים

לְקַטְנוּ פְּרָחִים בְּשָׂדוֹת, בְּהָרִים
נִשְׁמְנוּ רוּחוֹת חֲדָשׁוֹת שֶׁל אָבִיב
נִשְׁטַפְנוּ בְּלֶהֱט קִרְנֵיהָ שֶׁל שֶׁמֶשׁ
בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹלָדָת, בְּבַיִת חֲבִיב.

אֲנַחְנוּ הוֹלְכִים אֶל אֲחִים בְּנֶכֶר
בְּסֶבֶל הַחוּרָה, בְּחוּשֶׁךְ וּכְפֹר
לִבְנוּ יָבִיא אֶת בְּשׂוּרַת הָאָבִיב
שֶׁפָּתְנוּ תְרוּן אֶת הַזְּמֶר לְאוֹר.

We gathered flowers

We gathered flowers in the fields in the mountains,
 We breathed fresh winds of spring,
 We were washed with the heat of the sun's rays
 in our Homeland, in a lovable home.

We go to brothers in diaspora,
 in the suffering of winter, in darkness and frost.
 Our heart will bring the message of springtime,
 Our lips will sing the song of light.

(3.1944)

This poem was written right before Hannah Senesh's departure to Yugoslavia. She gave it to one of her friends asking him to open it only in case that she will not return from her mission. It might describe the result of the collaboration between the Yeshuv and the Brits and thus hint towards the coming mission and its main goal. The poem is built of two parts. Each one contains four lines that differ from each other both because of the structure of the text but also because of their completely different atmosphere.

In the first part there is an optimistic mode. The speaker describes how she and a group of people gathered flowers in the fields and the mountains while spring was in the air with its freshness and a promise of a new beginning with the light and warmth of a sunny day. They were happily singing. There are no details given however as to the other individuals in the group.

The second part of the poem starts with a change of place: from the homeland to the diaspora, and, of the season of the year: from spring to winter accompanied by a change in the weather from sunlight and warmth to darkness, frost and a great misery. But at this point these changes do not yet have an influence on the individuals of the group. In their hearts there is still hope of spring and they still carry the songs of light on their lips, and with them they bring to the ones who suffer the hope for life.

In this poem, in difference from the texts discussed above, the speaker refers to herself as a part of a group. Therefore the verbs are used in the first person plural and not as in the texts above, in the first person singular.

The connection that is made in this paper between the life and poems of Hannah Senesh and the other paratroopers become more obvious when reading this poem where the writer herself emphasizes this bond.

The next poem was written while she was on Yugoslavian soil, just before she left in order to get into Hungary. Time was passing by and about three months had passed from the time she landed in Yugoslavia while the situation in Hungary became almost

unbearable to the Jews.⁸ Hannah could not get into Hungary because of the political and military uncertain situation inside Hungary and on the borders, but on that day she decided that her mission was much more important than her life and that she would not anymore sit and wait. On the night before she left she met a Jewish woman partisan who probably was the inspiration to the following poem.

אֲשֶׁרִי הַגִּפְרוֹר

אֲשֶׁרִי הַגִּפְרוֹר שֶׁנִּשְׂרַף וְהִצִּית לְהַבּוֹת,
אֲשֶׁרִי הַלְהָבָה שֶׁבִּעְרָה בְּסִתְרֵי לְבָבוֹת.
אֲשֶׁרִי הַלְבָבוֹת שֶׁיָדְעוּ לְחַדֵּל בְּכַבּוֹד...
אֲשֶׁרִי הַגִּפְרוֹר שֶׁנִּשְׂרַף וְהִצִּית לְהַבּוֹת.

(2.5.1944)

Blessed is the match

Blessed is the match that consumed and kindled flames,
Blessed is the flame that burned in the secrets of hearts.
Blessed are the hearts that knew to stop with honor...
Blessed is the match that consumed and kindled flames.

(Serdice, Yugoslavia, May 2, 1944)

This poem was written by Hannah Senesh in Yugoslavia upon her crossing the border to Hungary. Though she was on Hungarian soil she wrote this poem in Hebrew. She left it to Reuven Dafne.

The poem is built from only four lines. The first line is repeated at the end of the poem and by this a framework is created to the poem. There is one word that repeats as the first word in all four lines אֲשֶׁרִי which means “happy” or “blessed”. In each line, however, the subject is changed. While in the first line the subject is the match, in the second line it is the flame, and in the third line the hearts. Nonetheless, in the fourth line the subject is once more the match. There is a development of consequences: from one match that burned flames have started to light; and these flames have burned in the secret hiding places of the hearts. These hearts knew how to stop living with honor, and all this could have happened because of the match that burned and set fire in the

⁸ About Jewish life in Hungary previous to and after the Second World War see: Randolph L. Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, New York: Columbia University Press, New York 1981; Randolph L. Braham, Scott Miller. 1998. *The Nazis' Last Victims: The Holocaust in Hungary*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit 1998.

flames. Only one match is needed to create fire with big flames. In the same way only one person is needed in order to start a change, to make a difference.

These flames also burn in the heart of a human being and encourage him to make the difference and to hope for something better. They stop burning when he is dead. As long as a human being lives there is hope, courage and will to act, to fight, and to change. And all changes are thanks to a little match that created flames.

This poem is not only about heroism but also about self-sacrifices. The match that has created the flames exists no more. This poem was written after Hannah met a Jewish woman, a partisan, in the evening before she left into Hungary. Perhaps this woman was in her thoughts when she wrote the poem. No doubt it describes also Hannah's sacrifice, courage and determination when going out to a mission from which she very likely is not going to return. This poem, although written by Hannah, describes the situation of the other paratroopers who volunteered to this mission. It describes mostly the faith of the seven who did not come back from their mission and were "burned" while trying to set a fire in the hearts and souls of the survivors in order for them not to give up but continue struggling for their lives.

They were all very different. All seven who did not come back. Yet alike. The other woman killed, Haviva Reik, expressed a strong wish to return to Israel and live her life. She, along with Zvi Ben-Yaakov, Aba Berdichev and Rafael Rais were all born in Europe, speaking different languages, having varying backgrounds. Enzo Sereni, from Italy, the oldest among the paratroopers of this group, then in his forties, came from a very intellectual home with a father who was physician to the king of Italy. He himself was killed by the SS in Dachau to where he was taken. Peretz Goldstein shared Hanna's fate but was killed in Germany and not in Hungary. They all shared the making of the choice to come to the Yeshuv and thereafter to join the Haganah and volunteer to take part in this mission. They all felt a need to bring hope to the Jews of Europe.

Although probably they did not think as Hannah did, namely that if they had to sacrifice their life it did not matter when. Some of them, like Enzo Sereni, left behind children and a wife, others like Havivah Reik wished to get married and to build a family in Israel and all had dreams that were never to be fulfilled.

Reuven Dafne wrote about Hannah and his relations with her. Among other things he wrote how the poem "Blessed is the match" came to his hands. According to him, just before he and Hannah have departed from each other in order to enter Hungary in different ways and to reduce the risk of being caught together, Hannah gave him a piece of paper and asked him to make sure that people will know about it in case she will not return from this mission. Reuven Dafne was not keen about the matter and he threw the paper. But after but a few meters, he returned in order to pick it up. When he saw it was a poem he did not understand how Hannah could be occupied with such things in times like these but he kept it anyway and after his return from Europe he saw to it that it would be published.⁹

⁹ R. Dafne, *The Last Border*, in: *Hannah Senesh. Her Life and Diary*, pp. 170–179; translated by Marta Cohen, Park Road, Altricham: St Ann's Press.

The last poem to be mentioned in this paper is also the last poem written by Hannah Senesh. This poem differs from the other poems discussed in this paper as it was written in Hungarian:

Egy kettő három
nyolc lábak vágyódik
Kettő nagy lépések keresztül, a pihenés van sötét.
Élet van egy elröppenő kérdőjel

Egy kettő három
talán másik hét.
Vagy a jövő hónapban május csendes talál én itt,
De halál , Érzem magam van igazi mellett.

ÉN tudna volt
23 következő Július
ÉN hazardjáték -ra mi anyag a leg--bb,
a kocka voltak dob. ÉN elveszett.

(20.6.1944)

One – Two – Three
eight feet long.
Two strides across, the rest is dark.
Life hangs over me like a question mark.

One – Two – Three
maybe another week.
Or next month may still find me here,
But death, I feel, is very near.

I could have been
Twenty-three next July;
I gambled on what mattered most,
The dice were cast. I lost.

(Budapest 20.6.1944)¹⁰

¹⁰ Translated from the Hungarian by Peter Hay, op. cit.

This poem was written by Hannah Senesh during the last period of her life while she was in jail, before she was executed with no verdict. It was found by one of the guards in one of her pockets after she died.

This poem, the last poem she ever wrote as much as we know, was written in Hungarian. It is built of three stanzas. In each stanza three lines. All the stanzas start with a mark of measurement of time or space. Both first two stanzas start with the words "One-Two-Three" but while the first stanza continues with the number eight in order to measure the length of the cell in which she was held before her execution, the second stanza continues with "or perhaps one more week" in order to count the estimated period of time left until the end of her sitting in the cell. According to this poem, as she very soon will walk to her death, the third and last stanza starts differently. Nevertheless, also this stanza starts with a definition of time. According to the first line of this stanza Hannah Senesh is about to be 23.

From the first line it becomes clear that this poem was written before her 23rd birthday, namely before the 17th of July; which means that this poem was written at least three months before her death. This can be confirmed also by the date that is written on the right side under the poem (20.6.1944).

The poem starts with the description of the place in which Hannah Senesh physically was at the moment of its writing. A very small cell that when one takes two steps one comes from one side of it to the other. Her inner world is also disposed here as unclear "Life hangs over me like a question mark". From the continuation of the poem it is clear that the question mark stands not only upon the life to come or the present to end but also upon the past and the life she chose to live.

The second stanza continues the line of thinking of the first stanza. Also the second stanza starts with uncertain issues such as the period of time that Hannah Senesh still has in that cell. However, the end according to this stanza is clear-nothing is left, time was out. The end of her life already hangs above her head.

The connection between these two stanzas is emphasized also by the similar beginning. However, the future is pictured here as something much more clear than in the first stanza.

The third stanza opens with an expression of uncertainty concerning her ability to turn 23 years old. However, we know that she became twenty-three and died only about two months later. Hannah Senesh continues saying that she has gambled and lost but now she knows that what she was gambling on was her life, which according to her, was the most important thing. She continues by saying that the dice with which she gambled was cast and she lost her gamble.

This poem was written in Hungarian in Budapest, the city in which Hannah Senesh was born. There is a symbolic and also physical element of closing the cycle of her life. She was born and also died in Budapest. Her first poem was written in Hungarian and so was the last one. And while she most probably felt as if she was imprisoned during her last period in Hungary before departing to Israel, she was in a real cell upon coming back to it. Her life as a child with no heavy responsibilities had come to its end upon

her leaving Hungary the first time and now her life as an adult is about to end and she is going to leave Hungary and life itself for good.

This was the last poem that she wrote and deep inside her heart she knew that. The choice of the Hungarian language for writing this poem is remarkable and it might symbolize the closing of her life circle that began on Hungarian soil and with the Hungarian language.

After her execution in 1944 she was buried in the “Martyrs section” of Budapest’s Jewish cemetery. It is still unknown by who. However, her remains were brought to Israel in 1952 and were buried there again in the national military cemetery.

The seven paratroopers who died during their action beyond the lines of the Nazi occupied Europe were buried in the national military cemetery next to Jerusalem. In a somewhat separated area. Their gravestones form together the shape of a V.¹¹ These paratroopers were a part of a group of 32–37 people who were part of the British Armed Forces.¹² However, they were first and foremost Jews from Israel who wished to help the Jews who were trapped in Nazi occupied Europe. Of the thirty something sent to the mission, seven never came back alive.

These people chosen to the mission could not act upon it until they first completed the mission that was given them by the Brits, that is to try to save British pilots who fell captive behind Nazi lines and to organize a resistance among the inhabitants of these countries. Only then, when these missions had been completed, they could concentrate on saving Jews still alive in those countries, with the help of the local partisans.

They took off to their mission on the thirteenth of March 1944 from Brindisi, Italy and were dropped into Yugoslavia. They were seven paratroopers who decided to make a difference and to resist the Nazi mass murders and who paid for this choice with their lives.

Time and place of death:

Hannah Senesh – 7 November 1944, shot and died from her wounds, on the jail yard, Budapest, Hungary.

Enzo Sereni – 18 November, Dachau, Germany, place of burial unknown.

Haviva Reik – 20 November, 1944, shot in a forest and thrown to a mass grave, Kremnicka, Slovakia.

¹¹ See among others Senesh, p. 1.

¹² The number of paratroopers who actually parachuted on European soil is varying according to the different researchers. For instance, while according to T. and Z. Ofer (T. Ofer, Z. Ofer, *Haviva – The Life, Mission, and Fallof the Paratrooper Haviva Reik*; Sifriat Poalim Bnei-Brak 2004, in Hebrew) the number is 37, according to Y. Allon (Y. Allon, 1970. *Shield of David: The Story of Israel’s Armed Forces*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1970), and Y. Palgi (Y. Palgi, *And Behold, a Great Wind Came*, Am Oved, Tel Aviv 1977, p. 248, in Hebrew), the number is 32. J.T. Baumel discusses this dispute and its reasons (J. Tydor Baumel, J. 2004. *Perfect Heroes; The Parachutists from Palestine During Second World War and the Making of Israeli Collective Memory*, Ben Gurion University, Beer-Sheva 2004, pp. 14–18, in Hebrew).

Refael Rais – 20 November, 1944, shot in a forest and thrown to a mass grave, Kremnicka, Slovakia.

Peretz Goldstein – 1 March, 1944, Oranienburg, Germany. place of burial unknown.

Zvi Ben-Ya'akov – 29 December 1944, Mauthausen, Germany.

Aba Berdichev – 26 January 1945, shot, Mauthausen, Germany. Place of burial unknown.