



Uncle Peretz Takes Off: Short Stories

Yaakov Shabtai

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With the publication of his *Past Continuous* in 1983, Yaakov Shabtai gained the most prominent place in the canon of modern Jewish literature. *New York Times* critic Alan Lelchuk praised its portrait of contemporary Israeli society as "the most prodigious (and probably most realistic) in Hebrew fiction."

The stories in *Uncle Peretz Takes Off*, the first English language collection of Shabtai's short fiction, evoke the Zionist frontier spirit while capturing the shift from old world religiosity to new world secularism. Originally published in Hebrew in 1972, the collection is bookended by two linked stories chronicling the deaths of the narrator's grandparents and the corresponding loss of Jewish traditions. Several other linked stories feature the narrator's uncles, energetic men in the grip of ideals and passions (Zionism, communism, socialism, entrepreneurialism). Uncle Shmuel tries to make his fortune with "semi-automatic henhouses," while Uncle Fink juggles four women and the dream of building a Palestinian traveling circus.

With unparalleled lyricism and humanity, Shabtai's stories embody the comedy, energy, and tragedy of the early years of Zionism.

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