

Judge's Reasons for Choosing "A Bellyful of Tears" by Naomi Shmuel for the Acum* Prize for an anonymous literary creation

"A Bellyful of Tears" is a surprising & moving literary creation.

Good literature is measured by an author's ability to weave together in harmony the specifically local story with the universal human experience. Naomi Shmuel has managed to create this unique viewpoint in a heart-wrenching and thought-provoking manner.

Naomi Shmuel, a prolific & talented creative writer, has presented in her book the open chasm between Israeli reality and the life of immigrants who came here from Ethiopia. She describes the 'non-local' locals, a world inside our world, at the heart of which is the constant struggle between conserving their unique identity with the pain in letting go of the past and the desire to enter the challenging world of Israeli society, at once both attractive and repulsive to them.

The story takes place in Israel, where a family of Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia, still struggling to adjust to Israeli reality, are faced with a devastating tragedy which threatens to tear them apart and break their spirit. The book is written in the first person, presenting a double image; past and future, there and now. When the story turns to the past, to life in their Ethiopian village, it's people, stories and customs, colors and odors, it presents a soft, loving, but not nostalgic, view. When the story turns to the here and now it is disillusioned, free of romance, and yet full of compassion.

The road to acceptance is long, no-one can foresee how it ends. Naomi Shmuel knows this, and yet she dares to build a bridge of hope over the difficulties and limitations. The beauty of the book is in its modesty, its gentleness, like a water-color painting. Grief and pain are internalized to perfection, and alongside them, without exhortation, are the universal

human values that we have almost forgotten; family commitment, parental respect, human dignity – including the dignity of children and young people, the longing for love and the hope for good. Never, until now, have such characters been written, and from such a close and reliable perspective. With her clear and compelling use of words and great moral courage Naomi Shmuel has created a whole world that exists just around the corner from us and yet is strange and inaccessible to most of us. Her writing is an art that comes from the heart and enters the heart of the reader. We are happy and proud to give her the Acum Prize for 2013.

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