For her fifteenth birthday, Netta Zagagi’s father bought her a collection of Greek Elegiac poems in the Hebrew translation of Shlomo Span. On the first page he wrote the following dedication: “Let the chief beauty [yafyuth] of Japheth be in the tents of Shem” (Megillah 9b). If your soul wishes to know the real taste of Greek poetry, go to the source — hoping that you will learn the Greek language so that you will know the poetry of ancient Greece’.

This episode epitomizes Netta’s two passions: poetry and Classical Studies. Already as a child, in the small neighborhood of Bat-Galim in Haifa, she wrote and published poems in children’s and youth magazines. Poetry was her first passion, and she never abandoned it; when she was twenty, her first poetry book was published (1967), and in 2008 her second, which also includes selected translations from the ancient Greek poet Meleager of Gadara’s poems. But the seeds which Netta’s father, the Bible scholar Peretz Sandler, had planted in her as a girl, acquiring for her every published translation of the Classical works, sprouted and fashioned her into a distinguished scholar in Greek and Latin literature.

Those who participated in her classes or attended her lectures in academic conferences could not fail to recognize her poetic spirit, which was manifested in her passionate love for and deep understanding of Latin and Greek poetry. Her profound, thought-provoking and learned studies and her translations (which were quite often poetic in themselves) always remained faithful to the author’s world, language and rhythm.

Netta began her studies towards a B.A. degree in 1967 in the expanded track of Greek and Latin Languages and Literature in the Department of Classics at Tel Aviv University. After graduating (summa cum laude) in 1970, she taught Latin for two years at the Department of Classics. In 1972 she was sent to Oxford University to study for her DPhil degree. Under the supervision of Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones she wrote her doctoral thesis, Tradition and Originality in Plautus: Studies in the Motifs of Love in the Plautine Comedy.

In 1977, upon her return to Israel, Netta was appointed Lecturer in the Department of Classics at Tel Aviv University, where she worked until her retirement in 2008. In 1981 she was promoted to Senior Lecturer, in 1986 she became an Associate Professor, and in 1995 a Full Professor.
Between 1994 and 1996 she was the head of the Department of Classics. Between the years 2000 and 2002 she was a co-editor of *Scripta Classica Israelica*.


At the focus of Netta’s research was Greek Comedy — the ‘Old Comedy’ (of Aristophanes) and especially the ‘New Comedy’ of Menander and its adaptations by Roman playwrights (Plautus, Terence and others). She also studied the Greek lyric and the Hellenistic poetry, especially the Bucolic poems of Theocritus and the Love epigrams of the Greek Anthology. Many of her studies examine the law and society of ancient Greece and Rome as reflected in love poems and stories which use legal, political and military metaphors. She was also one of the few who handled the Greek genre of Satyr play.

In her first book, *Tradition and Originality in Plautus: Studies of the Amatory Motifs in Plautoine Comedy* (1980), based on her doctoral dissertation, Netta refuted Eduard Fraenkel’s widely accepted theory about Plautus’ originality in drawing hyperbolic mythological comparisons. Examining a wide range of Greek texts (Tragedy, Old and new Comedy, Philosophy, the Hellenistic epigrams, and the Greek Novels), Netta suggested a re-appraisal of Fraenkel’s arguments and conclusions and highlighted Plautus’ dependency on his Greek sources. Yet she also emphasized Plautus’ originality in two areas: in his adaptation of the iambic monologues he found in the Greek plays, turning them into love songs in various meters; and in his use of legal terminology to present motifs of love for comic effect (a subject she returned to in some of her articles, see below).

In her book *The Comedy of Menander: Convention, Variation & Originality* (1995), Netta shifted the focus of her research from the Roman stage to its Greek sources. She argues that the playwright creates a special space, where comedy and daily life meet. She observes three artistic principles or techniques in Menander’s work: polyphony — the interlacing of themes, motifs, and multifaceted plots; economy — conciseness and brevity in developing scenes and characters, and dramatic parsimony in using devices; and emphasis on human interaction — the playwright’s use of direct interaction between his characters, striving to solve the complications they face. The book also postulates two dramatic viewpoints: the one reflects the characters’ behaviour in a realistic way, conforming to contemporary social conventions; the other, as it were, comprises a mythical dimension, integrated into the realistic course of events.

These two impressive scholarly works, and the many articles which deal with similar and other themes (see list below), gave Netta a world-wide recognition. When the news about her death became known, scholars around the world wrote to offer their condolences and to emphasize their debt to her scholarship. She was highly regarded by scholars in Israel and abroad, and was often invited to participate in conferences and contribute to collections of articles.

Netta was a perfectionist. She would not publish or lecture about anything unless she considered it flawless. The same high standards which she set to herself she also expected of her students and colleagues — an unwelcome quality in an impatient world, hurrying to gain immediate success and seeking shortcuts. But those who were not afraid to work hard benefited from her immense knowledge, sharp perception and absolute devotion. She was a total person in every aspect of her life: as a teacher, a scholar and as a wife and mother. The same devotion that had made her such an accomplished and well respected scholar, was also applied in her private life, as the wife of Gadi and mother of three children.

She will be sorely missed by her loving family and devoted friends, and remembered fondly and with appreciation by her students and colleagues.
Netta Zagagi’s publications

Books

Articles

Reviews


### Publications in Hebrew

**Book**

1979. *Attic Drama*, Unit 7 in *Classical Greece*, The Open University of Israel.

**Articles**


2010. ‘Methods of Translation and Adaptation in Roman Comedy’, *Textus* 25 (dedicated to David Weissert on his 80th Birthday): 205-224.

**Reviews**


**Poetry**

1967. *Like a Nun Whose Hair is Warm*, Eked.


Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz