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*Divergent Jewish Cultures*  
*Israel and America*

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*For Ione Strauss*

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*“I Am Other”: The Holocaust Survivor’s  
Point of View in Yehudit Hendel’s  
Short Story “They Are Others”*

NURITH GERTZ

A central dichotomy in Israeli culture between Diaspora Jew and Hebrew Israeli aims to eliminate Israeli culture’s hybridity and consolidate a homogeneous Hebrew identity. Zionism fashioned the Hebrew-Israeli identity by negating everything that threatened this homogeneity, especially the Jewish Diaspora. This dichotomy of Diaspora Jews and Israeli Hebrews is most saliently expressed in works dealing with Holocaust survivors. In these texts, the Holocaust survivor embodies Diaspora culture and history, and his identity, cultural world, and fate contrast with Hebrew culture, the history of *Eretz Israel* (the land of Israel), and the Zionist program.

Many stories, novels, and films written and produced in the 1940s and 1950s put Israel’s recently arrived Holocaust survivors through an educational process in which they exchanged their Diaspora Jewish identity for a Hebrew-Israeli one, emerging at the end as pronouncedly pure Israelis.<sup>1</sup> These stories do address most of their “sympathy” to Holocaust survivors

but “nullify” them as independent, separate, differentiated characters with their own past, identity, and experiences.

Even in most works that attempt to dismantle this simple linear process of transformation, their heterogeneity is eventually blurred. Ultimately all the survivors’ biographies merge by analogy into one account: that of the transformation that turns Diaspora Jews into Israelis. This is the Zionist narrative that all protagonists who carry “Diaspora Jewish traits” experience, each in his or her own way and time, each ascending a hierarchical ladder on which strength emanates from the top, the Israeli top. This intent, which informed much of the fiction produced in those decades, changed direction in subsequent literature and cinema, produced mainly in the 1980s and thereafter, and in literature written by Holocaust survivors themselves. These works dispense with the dominant narrative that leads Diaspora Jews to their Hebrew-Israeli identity. As a result, details and events that are meaningful in the films and novels of the 1950s become meaningless, arbitrary, and incomprehensible. In contrast, the later works organize previously ignored biographical details of survivors into a narrative that elevates them to a position of centrality.<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, Yehudit Hendel’s short story “They Are Others” (1949–1950) differs from most contemporaneous works of the 1950s. Its main protagonist, a Holocaust survivor, meets a woman with whom he forms an intimate relationship on the ship on his way to Israel and from whom he is separated on shore, where he is sent to the Israeli army to fight in the War of Independence. The story neither retells the popular Zionist narrative nor shatters and dismantles it. The Jewish survivor is not an outsider who must adopt an Israeli identity. Neither is the survivor’s identity depicted as the one and only authentic identity. Hendel tells both accounts: that of the Zionist Hebrew society that attempts to refashion the survivor in its own image, and that of the survivor who cannot integrate into this society and assimilate the identity dictated to him. Hendel adopts the Zionist narrative of her time and describes it understandingly, but she examines it through the eyes of the disintegrated outsider. From this point of view, the narrative seems insensitive and cruel. The author actually pinpoints the phase at which two equivalent narratives, two histories, and two national identities confront each other: that of the “Hebrew” society, which subjects the Dias-

pora to total repudiation, and that of the survivor, who has come from that same Diaspora. Thus the perspective of Yehudit Hendel, quite innovative for her time, is located between the narrative of the 1950s and that of the 1980s. She was the first to describe the Hebrew culture of the 1950s as a hybrid.<sup>3</sup>

The two counterpositioned narratives create a state of ambivalence which dictates the poetics of Hendel's story. It fluctuates between masculine and feminine male heroes, between action and contemplation, passivity and activity, causal progress in time and static spatial descriptions. This poetics employs central and fringe models in the writing of its own time, models of writing that the contemporary culture considered masculine, and those adopted by women writers and, therefore, considered feminine. It also anticipates future models.

Yury Lotman describes ambivalent texts that fuse historical, ideological, and cultural models of different eras, culled from different locations in the cultural system.<sup>4</sup> Lucien Goldmann asserts a correlation between textual ambivalence and the situation of groups of intellectuals positioned between social classes and, for this reason, between different ideologies. According to Goldmann, only intellectual groups in such a situation can perceive the ideological contradictions of their time.<sup>5</sup> Homi Bhabha describes the national narration as an ambivalent one—a narrative in which the other is shaped as an object of attraction and fantasies on the one hand and an object for control and investigation on the other.<sup>6</sup>

Yehudit Hendel's writing may bridge these three definitions of ambivalence. She belonged to the cultural elite of the War of Independence generation, but men determined the literary and cultural norms of that generation. This situation, beyond her own talents and inclinations, allowed her to contemplate her surroundings from the outside (the fringe) *and* the inside (the center) and, for this reason, to adopt the ideological and poetic models of both. Thus she expressed social awareness from the point of view of the excluded outsider, to use Bhabha's term,<sup>7</sup> and revealed the fissures in the homogeneous voice of the mainstream hegemony, to which she simultaneously gave voice.

My claim in this chapter is that Yehudit Hendel, because she wrote from the perspective of a woman "torn" between two cultures, was able to break

the mold of the hegemonic Zionist narrative and to present other narratives — those of the fringe of her time and those that would come to dominate Israeli culture only years later.

#### MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEW

In literature and other texts written in the 1950s, the vantage point is that of the Israeli-born. In texts written since the 1970s, the vantage point is that of the Holocaust survivors. In Yehudit Hendel's story, both points of view dominate, thus expressing the author's ambivalence. The woman narrator of the story articulates this ambivalence by simultaneously taking the side of the coterie of War of Independence fighters and of Sheftel, the Holocaust survivor, who is not part of the group. "The fellows were again awash in smoke and conversation." In this intimate tone, that of the insider, she describes Sheftel's encounter with the group of sabras at the café. However, she immediately changes this insider's tone by adopting the point of view of the outsider, to whom the group members are strangers: "And the young guy with the checkered scarf, who considered himself the chief orator here, answered in a thick, rude voice" (p. 62). Although the point of view is that of Sheftel, the outsider who does not know the people in the group, the narrator reports conversational details in Hebrew, which Sheftel, of course, cannot understand. Thus, the point of view has become again that of the narrator. This point of view, however, is also ambivalent because the narrator reports only those fragments of conversation that may interest Sheftel: a discussion of the *Gahal* (overseas recruited fighters), most of whom were Holocaust survivors. Thus the story slides between two points of view, two angles — that of the sabras and that of Sheftel — and, practically speaking, adopts both.

The ambivalence of the story is based throughout on the confrontation between these two points of view. In the novels and films of the time, the Israeli tends to adopt the admiring look of the outsider, the survivor, and uses it to consolidate his sense of confidence and supremacy and present himself as an admired hero. After the survivor himself becomes a Hebrew-Israeli and adopts his hosts' point of view, he can confirm the Israeli identity by emulating and identifying with it.

Yehudit Hendel sculpts the survivor's admiring regard of the Israeli but exposes its meaning and changes its purpose. On the one hand, the survivor does confirm the Israeli's sense of supremacy. Sheftel and his friend regard the old-time Israelis, the sabras, as everything that Zionism has taught them to admire — active people, healthy in mind and body, courageous and vital, rooted in the country and its soil — and try to resemble them. In so doing, however, they take on the sabra point of view and, by means of it, repudiate their own identity, which, however, refuses to disappear and clashes with the Israeli identity throughout the story.<sup>8</sup>

The two points of view create a never-ending conflict between the two narratives — the Israeli Zionist narrative and that of the Holocaust survivor raised in the Diaspora — and constantly test and re-test each narrative in the light of the other. The reader, identifying with Sheftel's point of view, may judge those who send him to the army without allowing him to part with his girlfriend, the man who attempts to take his rucksack (the receptacle of all his belongings and memories), those who send him into combat without training, and those who consider him and his comrades "a bunch of misfits." However, Sheftel's point of view also admires them, justifies them, and judges Sheftel himself according to their point of view. He pictures himself moving about with a filthy rucksack, he blames his commander's death on his own stupidity, and he perceives himself and his comrades as a bunch of misfits. The account itself does not take an equivocal stance in this struggle between points of view, as the facts attest. The clerks make fun of Sheftel's rucksack but do not deprive him of it. The commander does not explain the combat orders to Sheftel but forfeits his life by returning to the battlefield to look for him after the retreat. The comrades in the café pay no attention to him most of the time but do try on several occasions to befriend him. Thus the point of view of the other, the stranger, leaves the Zionist narrative in place but purges it of its totality, as Bhabha says, by forcing us to contemplate it from an additional perspective, that of one who tries to adopt it but cannot.

Ambivalence also guides the way the story is read. As the plot progresses, contemporary Israel-born readers must abandon their point of view and adopt that of a Holocaust survivor. From this vantage point, they are urged to contemplate those who represent them in the story — the sabras, the soldiers, the group at the café — and to criticize them.

Tension between the two points of view surfaces in the very title of the story, "They Are Others." For contemporary Israeli readers, the "others" are of course the survivors. Only after they adopt the survivors' point of view can they perceive themselves and their representatives in the story as others — others in the eyes of immigrants and, in fact, strangers to their own identity. This is because the identity of the Diaspora Jew is a part of their own identity that they are trying to repress and banish from memory. This point is confirmed when Sheftel uses the term to describe the Israeli-born as others: "They are different," he tells his new friend Leizer, "They are simple and natural" (p. 37).

The blend of perspectives creates a mixture of categories and identities. Sheftel is a man described and observed through the eyes of a female author. He observes himself from the contemptuous point of view of Israelis, and thus repudiates his own identity. Concurrently, however, his look makes the Israeli himself a stranger to his identity, past, and origins. The vantage point of each participant in this story undermines his/her own ethnic identity and that of all the others, and thus the very definition of national ethnic identity changes and becomes, instead of a demarcated, homogeneous, and permanent "place," a crossroads with many possibilities.<sup>9</sup>

#### FLUIDITY OF IDENTITY

To shatter the Zionist canon of her time, Hendel attacks the integration that this canon creates between gender and nationality — between Zionism and masculinity and between Diaspora Judaism and femininity.

In many novels and films of the 1940s and 1950s, Jewish identity is converted by the plot into Hebrew identity in a simple process of substitution, one collection of traits succumbing to another. Immigrants to Israel are typified by a pool of "negative" Jewish traits, some of which were assessed as analogous to nonmasculine traits.<sup>10</sup> Cowardly and passive, these immigrants refuse to work and fight. Aloof to the place and landscape, they can neither circulate in this landscape nor contemplate it — two actions that symbolize, more than anything else at that time, masculine control of the country. Instead of clinging to the land and the new Hebrew collective, they adhere to memories of home and family — the space of the women. Ulti-



mately, they shed these traits and replace them with those considered Israeli and masculine. The others, who are left out, remind us at all times that the Zionist conversion process cannot be complete. In addition, the failure of those left out underscores the success of those who have made their way in, who have stopped being Jewish and have become Hebrew and Israeli.

Yehudit Hendel reveals the mechanics of this process and shows how fluid identity is when it hinges on constant definition of who is “in” and who is “out,” and how limited are definitions of identity when built on rigid dichotomies of Jew and Israeli, female and male.

The hero of Hendel’s story, Sheftel, cannot experience a process similar to the one that occurs in the other texts, simple or complex, because from the very outset he carries both kinds of traits: Diaspora-Jewish and Hebrew-Israeli, feminine and masculine. His transformation in the course of the plot is not from a Diaspora Jew into an Israeli but from a carrier of a hybrid collection of traits into a person without them, who nevertheless tries to adhere to his heterogeneous identity: Jewish and Israeli, feminine and masculine. In this sense, Sheftel also differs from survivors in the works of the 1980s and 1990s, who discover the supremacy of their world and values relative to those of native Israelis.

On the ship, en route to Israel, Sheftel reconstructs the masculine roles he had played before the war — as husband and father — by taking care of and protecting the young woman he met on his journey, Paula. Although Sheftel’s role aboard the ship is masculine, it depends on traits often described as characteristic of the “femininity” of the Diaspora Jew, the exile, the survivor. He exhibits tenderness and sensitivity; his range of memories embraces the core family.<sup>11</sup> He contemplates reality at length but takes little action in it. His look is not the penetrating masculine gaze with which the Israeli protagonists dominate their landscape and control others, but rather a humane, subjective look that yearns to communicate, a look that carries a heavy load of memories and feelings, the look of women in Hendel’s other works.<sup>12</sup>

The connection between Sheftel’s gendered and national identity is already articulated aboard the vessel. True, he converses with his friend Paula in Yiddish, but his speech is reported in correct Hebrew that underscores Paula’s halting, fractured rhetoric. The possibility of controlling his fate and of integrating into the Israeli nation, as we learn during the story, hinges on

his ability to become fluent in Hebrew, regarded as one of the main characteristics of the new Hebrew identity. He possesses this fluency aboard the ship (where his Yiddish language is “translated” by the work into a fluent Hebrew) and, as we shall see later, he is deprived of it when he comes ashore.<sup>13</sup>

On the ship, Sheftel speaks the right and wrong language at the same time. His pride in his achievement is ambivalent, accompanied by a sense of insult and defilement that, like his other traits and feelings, is reflected in the surroundings and the landscape. The filthy sailors, the miserable, lost man with the suitcase, the porter carrying a sack, the polluted water at the port, the oily rust in the water, and the “befouled deck” all reflect his feelings about himself—his filthy, redolent rucksack, his greasy hair, and so on.

Thus, when he interacts with Paula on the ship’s deck, Sheftel is a person with “double” gendered and national identity that also contains clashing traits. Sheftel feels he controls his life, but he has also lost everything in the war, despises his identity, and expects to rebuild himself in Israel.

This ambivalence also typifies the other characters in the story and Sheftel’s relations with them. Paula has tender feelings for Sheftel but probably exploits them for her own purposes. Leizer behaves like a tough, crude sabra, but also like a “Diaspora” Jew, a survivor, a recent immigrant. Each protagonist’s contradictory traits shatter the story’s simple Israelis-and-survivors dichotomy and fracture the facile conversion of Diaspora Jewish identity into Israeli selfhood.

When he reaches the country, Sheftel parts with Paula and is sent to an army camp. From then on, he is defined by the uniform and rifle given to him. He must display his masculine traits in other ways, neither by means of women nor through personal, human, or family relations but in combat, as a member of a military male society. Many of the survivors in the literary and cinematic texts of the time discover their Hebrew identity in the same way, by integrating, as men, into a Zionist collective endeavor depicted as masculine (in conquest of the land or in battles, for example). In this phase, they forgo their private yearnings, including memories of home and family, and become part of the new collective.<sup>14</sup>

Sheftel, however, fails in his first collective action. First, he loses his linguistic superiority in Israel. In comparison with the Israelis who have

taken him in, his speech is halting, and his inadequate command of Hebrew seals his fate in combat. He heads for the battlefield with his comrades, but when the Arabs attack his battalion and his commander orders a retreat, he does not understand the order and spends a full night alone in the field. His incompetence in Hebrew — itself a sign of “national incompetence” — causes him to fail the first test of masculinity that should make him part of the new nation.<sup>15</sup> He comes across as a passive, helpless character, someone for whom others fight and die. His two failures — as a man and as a member of the new nation — are therefore fully intertwined.

He also fails the test of masculinity vis-à-vis women. Having lost his previous identity, he stops trying to find Paula and begins to ogle the young sabra women. He attempts to show them his manhood but does not succeed. They do not accept his national identity and, for this reason, they reject his masculine identity as well. From their standpoint, he is a Holocaust survivor, an exile, and an outsider. His emasculation is also connected with the loss of his previous femininity. His memories of family, daughter, and home recede, and his private, intimate encounters with Paula on the ship are replaced by collective encounters in Israel: in war, at the soldiers' hostel, and at the café. Thus, Yehudit Hendel takes apart the correlation — so clear and absolute in the other works of her time — between maleness and Israeliness and liberates masculinity from the dominion of national identity. Sheftel, unlike the other heroes, does not make the transition from a passive, feminine character to a fighting, active Hebrew. He was a man before he came to Israel, and he was able to exercise his manhood precisely because of his feminine sensitivity to family and love. Having reached Israel, he has to demonstrate his manhood in battle, and in his failure he loses both his masculine and his feminine identities.

This story also crosses the frontier between masculine and feminine in that Paula, Sheftel's friend, does not play the role that other contemporary works reserve for women: to help the survivor replace his Jewish identity with an Israeli one and to serve as a metaphor for this transformation — a metaphor for the transformation of the wasteland into blossoming landscape and barrenness into fertility. In Hendel's story, Paula is a three-dimensional character with whom the protagonist may be able to maintain a relationship. But the moment Sheftel is forced to take up the new Hebrew

identity, she vanishes. She neither supports the change he is expected to undergo nor plays any role in it, real or metaphorical. Just as Sheftel does not fulfill the male destiny assigned him by Israeli society, Paula does not fulfill the female destiny that this society has mapped out for her. However, Paula's absence underscores the monolithic maleness of the new world into which Sheftel has been inserted—a world that has room neither for the woman he has chosen nor for his own feminine traits. In this story, Hendel analyzes a condition that recurs in other stories of hers that have women protagonists: the feminine, familial, personal essence that Israeli society lost when it became a combative male society. The films of the 1980s probe the distortion the Israeli Zionist identity inflicted on itself by repressing its Diaspora Jewish character; Hendel examines in the 1950s how the masculine Zionist identity betrayed itself by denying its own feminine character.

#### ORIGINAL AND COPY

On the "journey" from his old Diaspora Jewish self to an Israeli identity, Sheftel clings to a series of substitutes and reflections. In this sense, too, this story is reminiscent of the literature of its time, especially Hanoach Bartov's novel *Each Had Six Wings*, in which immigrants were led to the Zionist identity in a slow and obstacle-strewn process. The protagonists in the later stories and films follow a similar course, but in the opposite direction. They move from the Israeli-Zionist identity to acknowledgment of the past and of a Diaspora Jewish identity. Yehudit Hendel stops her protagonist halfway, at a point where he has lost one identity but has not acquired another—a phase of total vacuum.<sup>16</sup> She deconstructs the process the survivors underwent in the narrative of her time and shows how one survivor, by adopting the point of view of his Israeli hosts, becomes estranged from the sources of his old identity without gaining the ability to acquire and assimilate a new one. The survivor becomes a shadow and a parable of his hosts.

In his fragmentary recollections, Sheftel drifts back not only to the events of the war and the Holocaust, as do contemporary protagonists in other works, but also to what preceded the war: home, family, the photograph of his daughter that rests in his pocket, memories of a gift he bought her, a white tablecloth, everything he lost in the Holocaust. Recollections of dev-

astation and exile usually determine the identity of Holocaust survivors. Sheftel's identity emerges through remembrances of his pre-Holocaust home and family as well.

On the ship with Paula, Sheftel recalls his daughter, his friend who has died, and his family. During his voyage Paula becomes a substitute of sorts for all this baggage, which he has lost. Later, in the army camp, Leizer asks him to show him a photograph of his beloved Paula. Leizer does not know that the picture in Sheftel's pocket belongs to the "original," his daughter, and not the "copy," Paula.

In Israel, Sheftel distances himself from both the original and the substitute, and turns toward a different original, the Israeli one. However, unless he repudiates his prior identity, which he cannot do, he will fail to acquire a new woman. At first, he tries to elude his original self by disengaging from the other, who remains on the outside, that is, from Leizer. He contemplates his comrade and observes in him, as in a mirror, the Diaspora traits that he has been asked to shed, such as his hooked nose, his ashen pallor, his dirty rucksack. Contemptuously he attempts to erect a barrier between himself and Leizer. "Leizer, a creature consumed by hardships, whose face has darkened — what has he got to do with all of that? Sheftel — different." The more strongly he adopts the Israeli point of view, the more he tends to reject Leizer's identity, which in fact is his own.

Sheftel acknowledges this at the end of the story by observing his crumpled shadow on the sidewalk and pinning his look on a stranger circulating in the street. The feeling that he has become a stranger to and a shadow of himself — like all his feelings — is projected onto and reflected in his environment. Thus it predicts the feelings of survivors in the works of the 1970s and thereafter.

#### REBELLION AGAINST THE DOMINANT NORM: THE PLOT

Although Sheftel leaves with nothing, he does not give up. In fact, he exacts his revenge, albeit only on the symbolic plane. The storyline escorts him in a poetic rebellion against the literary canon of the time, which becomes a prophecy of the new norms of the 1970s and subsequent years.

He exacts revenge by refusing to accept the new family that the Israelis

ostensibly try to give him. In contemporary fiction, Holocaust survivors reach Israel as children or teenagers. In the course of events, they must forget their real parents, who have perished in the Holocaust, and adopt new parents who will usher them through a symbolic rebirth and remake them as Israelis.<sup>17</sup> Hendel's story contains such a plot in metaphorical form only, in the persona of the revered commander who serves Sheftel as a father figure, and in the manager of the soldiers' club who contemplates Sheftel and his comrade with a "motherly look" and treats them like children (p. 49). However, Sheftel refuses to play the child's role in this plot and rebels against his metaphorical parents. He refuses to treat the housemother at the soldiers' hostel like a mother figure and murders his symbolic father by causing the commander's death. Sheftel, like Appelfeld's protagonists years later, is orphaned and estranged from the collective identity into which he should symbolically be born. In contrast to Appelfeld's protagonists, Sheftel is also distanced from his prior identity, the one he has tried to escape.

However, in the final episode, as he loiters outside the café he expresses a wish to see Paula again and to return to Leizer. Beyond his despair, he may again yearn for the solidarity of those who have been alienated, and by so doing, he may also be rebelling against the process that aims to rank and dichotomize others along lines of those left out and those marked for inclusion. This may mark the beginning of a path toward the acceptance of both identities — Diaspora Jew and Israeli.

#### REBELLION AGAINST THE DOMINANT NORM: POETICS OF SPACE AND TIME

Along with the rebellion that occurs in the hero's actions, Hendel's story concurrently wages a poetic rebellion against the male ideological and literary canon of its time, even as it respects and embodies it. The story preserves the optimistic linear time progression that dominates the literature of that generation and the Zionist narrative and leads the Jewish survivor to an Israeli identity. It also sabotages this progression. Time in Hendel's short story does advance and lead the protagonist from Europe to Israel, but its continuity is neither steady nor stable. It is usually a static time, devoid of meaningful occurrences, leaping from event to event or creating a tapestry

of random events with a proliferation of bland, meaningless details that, in contrast to those in contemporaneous stories, play no role in the plot or in the Zionist endeavor and do not create a narrative of progress.

Time seems to stand still throughout Sheftel's journey aboard the vessel. Nothing happens: "It's another two hours until dinner" (p. 17); "Look how quickly they ring for dinner" (p. 18). Sheftel himself makes no plans and sets nothing in motion. He just sits there, contemplating: "Sheftel sat for a lengthy time, watching the shore recede" (p. 18). In Israel, where Sheftel is forced to act, the ordinary progression of time does not resume; it remains fractured and truncated. Only two events are reported during this time: the battle and the furlough, with a void in between. Although the conventional continuum, known from other stories of the time, is preserved in familiar events — the voyage at sea, the act of immigration, setting out for battle, and so on — the story sabotages it throughout.

In other contemporaneous texts, space is subordinated to Zionist time and plays a didactic role in communicating Zionist ideology.<sup>18</sup> By means of their gaze and actions (combat, work, and an outing in the countryside), the protagonists control this space and propel events in time in a dynamic, causal plot.<sup>19</sup> Thus both dimensions — space and time — express the male, Zionist dominion over the country and over history.

In works dealing with Holocaust survivors, this merging of time and space is effected in plots of a special type. In the beginning of each story, the survivors are incapable of contemplating and circulating freely in the country they have reached. In this context, the ability to contemplate space and circulate in it expresses knowledge and command, given only to those who manifest and accept Zionist ideology. After survivors explore the country's landscapes and become familiar with them — after working in them and struggling and fighting for them — they acquire an Israeli identity and knowledge of Hebrew culture and adopt the Israeli point of view.

Yehudit Hendel's story liberates space from the Zionist time progression described here, just as it releases the look from the dominion of Zionist knowledge. The story concentrates on the protagonist's contemplation more than on his actions. This contemplation reveals a non-Zionist space, devoid of ideological purpose, which expresses — at the most — the protagonist's inner feelings. However, ideology is not totally excluded from this

space. It exists there, albeit in a parodic, distorted form. Thus one may say that the survivor-hero, by means of his look, liberates the landscape from the dominion of the Zionist ideology that still shapes it and strives to give it autonomy.

By choosing to organize her story around space instead of time, in a poetics based on mapping instead of action, on sensory reception of colors and hues instead of ideological generalizations, Yehudit Hendel has undermined the dominant poetics in the literature of her generation. Her writing rests on an existing model in Hebrew literature that traces back to Gnessin, continues in the fiction of the 1930s, and is consummated in the fiction of S. Yizhar, another author who both expresses and subverts the norms of the era.<sup>20</sup> By choosing to liberate the description of space from the progression of time and to liberate look from action, Hendel also follows in the wake of a poetics that feminist theories typify as female, as a “semiotic language<sup>21</sup> — based on rebellion against the male point of view, which, in Western civilization, is supposed to define and control women.<sup>22</sup> Hendel’s choice also befits the contents of the story, because it makes a statement of sorts against what history has done to the hero: “dragged along for many years and not dead.” The depiction of space immediately follows this biographical summary of time as a response and an answer: “Now the sea is tranquil and singing a light breeze-song” (p. 11). Thus the choice of space over time, and of look over action, is chosen by Hendel from a subversive literary stock and is used in order to protest against history by those relegated out of it or forced to its margins: the protagonist as a Jewish survivor and the author as a woman in a male society. In other stories by Hendel, her writing articulates the protest of other outsiders: women, Sephardi Jews, other immigrants.

In many ways, accounts of space are substitutes in the story for temporal unfoldings of events and accounts of action. The fact that the day has ended and evening is approaching is reported in an account of the changing colors of the sky and the sea: “The sinking daylight turned violet. . . . Meanwhile, the sea turned red” (p. 11). The fact that the recruits are being driven to their camp is described not with appropriate verbs but rather by means of an account of the “mountain crests roasting in yellow” (p. 34). The soldiers’ disembarking from the vehicle and readiness for battle is not reported at all;



instead, these are communicated in the account of how Sheftel snags his hands on the tip of a rock.

These depictions of space, used to characterize a protagonist who has exchanged action for contemplation, are metaphorical tools that express his feelings, emotions, and attitudes. Like other components, they communicate the ambivalence of his personality and his world—and shatter the familiar contours of the Zionist narrative, which they also follow. In the Zionist narrative as constructed by the films and books of the time, the move from Europe to Israel represents a transition from death to resurrection, from a dying continent to a blossoming land. The same transition exists in Hendel's story but is much more complicated. Hendel's story concurrently monitors and shatters this transition because both of these locations are perceived ambivalently.

Sheftel's attitude toward Europe, which he is about to leave, emerges from the account of the poverty he observes around him: the "bleary-eyed beggar woman" who tugs at his robe (p. 9), the polluted water in the harbor, and the sunset over the sea, which looks to him like flames "spreading over a burning field." However, the accounts of poverty, pollution, and flame merge into the beckoning colorfulness of the surroundings, which, bursting upon him in hues of white, violet, and blue, clashes with his explicit feeling: "His eyes gazed at the port in revulsion" (p. 10). Sheftel's revulsion expresses the Zionist attitude of one who is about to leave Europe and resettle in Israel. However, the depiction of this continent's beauty evades and contradicts this attitude.

When they reach Israel, survivors in other texts take a cross-country "field trip," during which they learn to dominate the landscape with their gaze, in combat, and through labor. Hendel's short story awards the landscape a different task but does not overlook its intended Zionist role. When Sheftel reaches Israel, he resembles his fictional peers. He sees nothing; the narrator describes the landscape in his place: "If there were room he would have looked out and seen Haifa." Even when he looks out, he sees nothing but a "web of houses rushing past the window" (p. 23).

Generally, the beginning of the story invokes the metaphor of blindness to typify Sheftel, following the convention in other typical texts of defining Holocaust survivors as people who neither observe nor see.<sup>23</sup> Sheftel, like

Bartov's protagonist, travels in the beginning of the story with eyes that are teary, glazed, or closed. He peers at the world as would a man who is either blind or blinded by the magnitude of his anguish and suffering. The blindness stereotype, however, is fractured at the very beginning of the plot when we discover, in contrast to the convention in the other texts, that the point of view of this story is usually Sheftel's. As the plot continues, he again contemplates his surroundings, and his gaze pits his knowledge against that of Israeli society.

In contemporary narratives, survivors move about at first in a wasteland and are depicted as its metaphor. The wasteland in these works, however, is a point of departure for the metaphorical change that these characters experience as it is replaced by a blossoming garden.

In Hendel's story, the wasteland incompletely serves as a metaphor. The Israeli landscape does not lead Sheftel to the classic Zionist moral. He relates to the Israeli desolation with the same ambivalence that he feels toward the country he has left. He does notice "yellow-gray hills" and "riven mountains exposed to the sun" (p. 24). However, he likens the hills to mounds of wheat and sees green through the dryness. Like the other protagonists, he bonds with this landscape in the course of battle. Unlike them, however, he does not see at this time the blossoming landscape into which he will merge after the victory. He observes a primeval, fissured, scarred landscape. Overhead, the sky resembles "transparent crystal," and "an immense gray silence descends as far as the eye can behold" (pp. 33, 34). This landscape eludes Zionist knowledge — a desert not meant to be greened.

Thus, the landscape portrayed during the protagonist's first steps in Israel resembles the one described in other texts, only its significance differs. Hendel's account attempts to restore its familiar meaning by inserting the landscape into a recognizable metaphorical pattern of transition from wasteland to efflorescence—first during the battle, when for the first time it arouses Sheftel's amazement, and later during his outing to Haifa.

This outing is structured in the form of a field trip, much like similar accounts in other texts. It takes place as an ironic conquest of the mountain-top, a typical Zionist metaphorical endeavor described in so many songs, poems, and stories of the time. At first, the landscape is still bleak, the grapevines gray and bent. The autumn birds are black and gray, and Sheftel,

like other typical protagonists at this stage, is homesick. As the outing continues, Sheftel displays some activism. For the first time in the story, his movements in climbing the mountain are described with action verbs and not by reports of changing scenery. As he ascends Mount Carmel, he finds a different landscape, green and blooming, and discovers the mint-green crests of the Carmel range and the violet sky. This account, too, is ambivalent — a transition from greenery to a “gaping abyss” and “clouds [that] roll in again, become dark, and turn into night” (p. 46). The dominant spectacle here, however, is not the wasteland but the efflorescence — and this dominance persists.

Ultimately, the ascent to the “mountaintop” fails. Sheftel and his friend reach the peak, where the colors become dull and then vanish. The greenery becomes “sooty-green valley-craters,” replaced by “lonely electric lamps and rotten-yellow light” (p. 60). There at the top, the observers become glassy-eyed and descend in exhaustion. Thus, Sheftel has learned to contemplate the scenery through Israelis’ eyes — to set out to conquer the mountain and to seek the blossoming that lies beyond the wilderness — without becoming a part of it. He has not managed to cross the metaphorical barrier, from wasteland to efflorescence, achieved by other survivor protagonists. Aware of this failure, he invokes the same metaphor of wasteland and fertility to liken sabras to “fruit trees drenched in sunlight and juices of the earth, like a wheat stalk, like an orange, like a purple grape” and to compare himself and Leizer to dried twigs: “Leizer’s laugh is like a pile of twigs” (p. 45).

Sheftel thus shares the same educational rites as contemporary protagonists. He heads for battle, explores the country, and even reaches the mountaintop. Later on, he attempts to break into the circle of dancers. These rites, which Holocaust survivors routinely use to confirm their passage into Israeli society, fail in Sheftel’s case. Instead of being reborn as an Israeli, he remains an outsider — neither an Israeli nor a Diaspora Jew, endowed with neither past nor present. Despite his failure, he retains the “territory” that he has removed from Zionist culture: that of landscapes that preceded Zionism and sights that no longer serve it as metaphors and illuminate nothing but his ambivalent inner world. These sights — personal, not collective — are positioned at the margins of the national narrative; although they do not shatter this narrative totally, they infringe on its generality and absoluteness.

Years later, Israeli literature, films, and other texts invoked these formerly marginal devices to shatter this type of narrative altogether.

#### SUMMARY

Over the past fifty years, many works in Israeli literature and cinema have created a clear dichotomy between Holocaust survivors and the Israeli society that adopted them, thus expressing the dichotomy that the Israeli culture posited between the native Israeli and the Diaspora Jew.

In the works of the 1950s, the survivors' Jewish identity is obliterated in favor of the new Israeli identity, and in later works the opposite occurs: the Israeli identity is judged, silenced, and made to yield to the preferable identity, culture, and past of the survivor. These later works "rebel" against Zionist hegemony and award a central position to the erstwhile outsider. In so doing, however, they reestablish a homogeneous culture in which only one voice is audible and other voices (in this case, those of Zionist culture and history) are stifled.

In her short story "They Are Others" Yehudit Hendel shatters both poles of the dichotomy and attempts to present a new possibility: an ambivalent identity that embraces Diaspora and Israel, male and female, Israeli and Jewish, time and space. This identity is not realized in the story, nor could it be realized credibly in view of the options of the time. Therefore, it is presented as something that is missing, as a possibility. The very revelation of this lacuna, however, expresses the story's rebellion against its contemporary culture. It presents the narrative that had dominated other works, indicating its failure and liberating "territories" that the narrative had annexed in contemporaneous texts. It dismantles the time that articulated Zionist ideology, creates a space not connected to it, and entitles the protagonist to contemplate this space without Zionist knowledge. However, this story does not carry its hero from the one extreme of the Jewish-Israeli dichotomy to the other. Instead, it examines how the elimination of one of its poles in turn eliminates an ambivalent, inclusive, complex identity in both poles: how erasing femininity also erases masculinity, and how eradicating the identity of the Diaspora and Jewish past also eradicates a Hebrew-Israeli identity. In so doing, Hendel's story rejects the negation-of-Diaspora attitude that domi-

nated the Israeli culture of the time, even as it rules out the rejection of Zionism that many recent texts have proposed as a response.

#### NOTES

1. Examples are Moshe Shamir, *He Walked in the Fields*, Abba Kovner, *Face to Face*, and films such as *My Father's House*, and *Tomorrow Is a Wonderful Day*. These films are analyzed in Nurith Gertz, "The 'Others' in Israeli Films of the 1940s and 1950s: Holocaust Survivors, Arabs, Women," in Nurith Gertz, Orly Lubin, and Judd Ne'eman, eds., *Fictive Looks—on Israeli Cinema* (Tel Aviv, 1998), pp. 381–403 (in Hebrew); and "Holocaust and Holocaust Survivors in Israeli Cinema in the 1950s," in Mordechai Bar-On, ed., *Creative and Intellectual Endeavor in Israel's First Decade*, forthcoming.

2. See Nurith Gertz, "Zionism, Kibbutz, and Town: The Struggle for the Souls of Recent Immigrants in Hanoach Bartov's Novel *Each Had Six Wings*," in *Iunim Bitkumat Israel*, vol. 8, pp. 498–522. For example, see Aharon Appelfeld's *Searing Light* and films such as *Wooden Gun*, *New Land*, *Avia's Summer*, and *Tel Aviv Berlin*. On Appelfeld's novel, see Nurith Gertz, "From Jew to Hebrew: The Zionist Narrative in *Searing Light*," in Iris Parouche and Yitzhak Ben-Mordechai, eds., *Between Frost and Smoke* (Beersheva, 1997), pp. 124–45.

3. Following Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London, 1990), p. 305, one may say that the added element of the survivor's point of view shatters the totality of the national account.

4. Yury Lotman, "The Dynamic Model of a Semiotic System," *Semiotica* 21 (1977), 3–210.

5. Lucien Goldmann, *Pour une Sociologie du Roman* (Paris, 1966).

6. Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," in Russell Ferguson et al., eds., *Out There* (New York, 1990), p. 6.

7. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, p. 12. See also Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* (New York, 1992), p. 190, James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture* (Berkeley, 1986); Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Identity, Community and Cultural Difference* (London, 1990); and Toril Moi, *The Kristeva Reader* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 210, 296.

8. As Bhabha puts it in *Nation and Narrative*, p. 317, they adopt the Israeli narrative by way of mimicry, incomplete imitation. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), pp. 88–89 describes how the other uses the language in

an alien fashion, creates a void in it, and adopts the dominant point of view by way of mimicry that dismantles it and makes it look ridiculous.

9. Clifford (p. 18) defines identity as a mobile site of contradictions, a capsule containing different types of discourse. See also Hall (p. 22) and Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, "No Homeland for Israelis in the place of the Jews," *Theory and Criticism* 5 (Autumn 1994), p. 93, who describe such a type of identity as an exile's identity, the definitions of which vary according to categories of gender, language, and territory. Hendel strives to describe this capsule of which the survivor's identity is composed.

10. The discussion of the femininity of the Jew is well-known. Here it is based on Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley, 1997). See also Gertz, "The 'Other' in Israeli Films," and Rhonda Cobham, "Misgendering the Nation: African Nationalist Fiction and Nuruddin Farah's Maps," in Andrew Parker et al., eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York, 1992), p. 47, on the fashioning of the other's femininity.

11. Concerning the house as a private space controlled by woman, see, for example, Margaret Higonnet, "Suicide: Representations of the Feminine in the Nineteenth Century," *Poetics Today* 6 (1985), 108.

12. For the distinction between the look and the gaze, see Kaya Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World* (London, 1996). See also Orly Lubin, "The Woman as Other in Israeli Cinema," in Lawrence Silberstein and Robert Cohn, eds., *The Other in Jewish Thought and History* (New York, 1994); Lily Ratok, "Two Responses," *Theory and Criticism* 5 (Autumn), 165–77 (in Hebrew).

13. It is the silence of the various others—the lack of language—that allows Hendel to describe one in terms of another.

14. See Y. Raz, *The Image of Masculinity in Israeli Cinema*, M.A. thesis, Tel Aviv University (in Hebrew) and Amnon Raz-Krokotzkin, "Exile amid Sovereignty: A Critique of Diaspora Repudiation in Israeli Culture," *Theory and Criticism* 5 (Autumn 1994), 113–30 (in Hebrew).

15. He underscores the barrenness of the language and thereby deterritorializes it, to use Deleuze and Guattari's term. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "What Is Minor Literature," in Russell Ferguson, et al., eds., *Out There* (New York, 1990), p. 61. On negation of the Jewish identity and the search for alternatives to it, and on the role of language in this step, see Benjamin Harshav, *Language in a Time of Revolution* (Berkeley, 1993). The story reconstructs the event of the battle at Latrun, in which recent immigrants—Holocaust survivors—fought and were

killed after just having debarked. If one describes the myths that Israeli culture manufactured regarding this battle, one may say that the story gives shape to several conflicting accounts of the event.

16. From this standpoint, Hendel analyzes and articulates the process described by Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1977), in which the native is made to regard and experience himself as an "other." Bhabha, "The Other Question," p. 81, describes the same situation, in which, dominated by the white man's point of view, the black child dissociates from himself and his race and identifies totally with the white man, whom he perceives as the epitome of perfection.

17. The film *My Father's House* has the most obvious example of such a plot.

18. For an analysis of the dimensions of time and space, see Inderpal Grewel, *Home and Harem* (Durham, 1996), esp. p. 24.

19. See also my book, *Hirbet Hiza'a and the Morning After*.

20. See the account of this phenomenon in my book *Captive of a Dream*.

21. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York, 1980). See Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel* (Durham, 1996), pp. 25, 31.

22. This was the poetics of Virginia Woolf, adopted in the 1960s and thereafter by the author Amalia Kahana Karmon. See in particular Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (Paris, 1949). Concerning the masculine point of view, see Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16:3 (1975); and Silverman, *The Threshold of the Visible World*.

23. Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*, considers this an indication of emasculation. According to this construction, the trait of blindness ties into the other feminine traits of the Jewish survivor.