

Oedipus' Sister:
Narrating Gender and Nation in the Early Novels of Israeli Women

by

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DEDICATION

כדמי ימיה מתה אמי, ככת ששים ושיש שנה הייתה במותה

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my mother Nira Makov. Her love, intellectual curiosity, and courage are engraved on my heart forever.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation follows the emergence of the first novels to be written by women in Israel after 1948. Largely ignored until now, the corpus of the female interwar novelists [1948-1966] consists of more than twenty novels which offer a diverse and innovative engagement with questions of gender and nation. The dissertation presents a reading of six such novels, framed within a discussion of the writers' choice of genre, a highly uncommon venue for women writers during that time.

The main argument of this dissertation is that women novelists of the suggested period proposed alternative interpretations to the prevailing Zionist meta-narrative which dominated Hebrew male-centered literature. By employing strategies of appropriation and subversion, these writers have managed to portray alternative protagonists with different trajectories

The six novels analyzed in the dissertation are closely read through the lenses of various theories. First, theories of the novel are explored in an examination of the chosen genre and the unique possibilities of resistance it offers. Next, the novels are read in conjunction with feminist and postcolonial theories as a means to highlight their moments of interruption of the national narrative, and as a tool to recognize and explain strategies of resistance and defiance.

My reading reveals that while often adopting canonized poetics, the female interwar novelists use this form of appropriation as a cover up for their subversive content. Offering marginal protagonists, both women and men, they reread the national narrative by either foregrounding feminine and artistic coming-of-age stories that defy stereotypical gender roles, or by exposing the ruptures within the model of national manhood through the exploration of male protagonists and their nationalized masculinity.

This dissertation presents a two-fold contribution to the field of modern Hebrew literature. First, it adds a “missing link” to the story of women’s writing, exposing a continuity that contradicts previous depictions of this writing as sporadic and mostly marginal. Second, it rattles prevalent perceptions of the literary canon, revealing how its so-called margins managed to infiltrate and undermine the ruling literary norms of the time, while anticipating some of Israel’s most prominent literary works.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Abstract.....	vi
Introduction: Demarcating The Female “Interwar” Novelists [1948-1966]	1
The Anxiety of Survival	5
On Gender and Nation in Israel: The Case of Literature.....	8
Adding the Missing Link.....	14
Chapter Overview.....	15
Chapter 1: Writing the Novel: Gender, Nation and Canonicity	18
The Genre of the Novel	19
Gender and Genre: the Novel from a Feminist Perspective	26
National Identity and the Novel	33
A Short History of the Israeli Novel.....	39
A (very) Short History of Hebrew Women Novelists	44
Chapter 2: Gender and Genre: Writing the Female Bildungsroman in Naomi Fraenkel’s Trilogy <i>Shaul and Yohannah</i>	56
Reading Germany in Israel	59
The Bildungsroman	64
<i>Gender and Family, the Patriarchal Home: First Volume</i>	69
Angel or Warrior? Feminine Role-Models in the Trilogy.....	72
Jewish Manhood: A Dead-end	78
<i>The Butterfly Awakens: Second Volume</i>	82
Pygmalion’s Curse: Erasing Identity.....	86
Testing Ideologies: Gender, Violence and Withdrawal	89
<i>Bidding Goodbyes, the Beginning of the Journey: Third Volume</i>	93
Killing the Jew Within.....	94
Resurrection: Retracing the Maternal Lineage.....	96
Womanhood Resisted.....	99
The Collapse of Patriarchy	102
<i>“It’s So Wonderful to Run Toward a Secret”</i>	103
Chapter 3: The Portrait of the Woman as a Young Artist: Sexual Identity and the Nation in Rachel Eytan, Miriam Schwartz, and Batya Kahana	107

“How Sharp is the Pleasure of Choice”: <i>The Fifth Heaven</i>	110
Failed Fatherhood	116
Alternative Family	117
Nationalizing Sexuality	119
Writing Identity	124
Rewriting the Canon	128
The Taming of the Goddess: <i>Eve Gottlieb</i>	130
Paradise Lost	134
Breaking Boundaries	140
Struggling With the National Demon	142
The Birth and Death of the Goddess	148
"Passing the Love of Women," Homoerotics and the Nation: <i>The Arrows Are Beyond Thee</i>	154
Rewriting The Law of the Father	157
Crossing Borders of Gender and Nation	164
The Romance Novel as an Alternative Narrative	170
Women Writing Women: the Case of the Gender-Biased Review	172
<i>Nation and Family</i>	174
Chapter 4: Undoing National Manhood: Marginal Men in Yehudit Hendel and Shoshana Shrira	179
Watching Life through a Window: <i>The Street of Steps</i>	183
The Cartography of High and Low	191
National Motherhood	196
Speaking the Street	198
Ashkenazi/Sepahrdi Dichotomy	200
Gender Role Reversal	202
Back to the Sea	209
The Return of the Repressed: <i>Lovers' Bread</i>	211
Nation and Eros	216
Re-narrating Diaspora	220
Performing the Soldier	222
The "Second Israel"—center and periphery	226
The Journey	230
Rewriting the Melting Pot Myth	235
Transcending Identities?	237
Conclusion: "The Voyage is Completed, the Way Begins"	241
Bibliography	247

INTRODUCTION

DEMARCATING THE FEMALE “INTERWAR” NOVELISTS [1948-1966]

The first novel to be written in Hebrew by a woman was published only in 2004. The novel was *Bamidron* [Downhill] and its author—Nehama Pukhachewsky—who wrote it sometime around 1925-1930, never dared to publish it. Pukhachewsky was one of the first *aliyah*'s most dominant women writers and an active advocate of women's rights.¹ She published several short stories and essays during her life and was often harshly attacked by critics who felt her writing portrayed the pioneers in a negative light. After her death in 1934, her literary will stated the following: “Did I write? No, there was no time, the hard work swallowed the writer and what was published I don't know how and when it was written.”² Her only novel, *Bamidron*, follows the struggles and failures of the first *aliyah* pioneers. Pukhachewsky, in fact, predicted the novel will only be published after her death since it focused on marginal characters and highlighted the darker aspects of the Zionist endeavor featuring despair and death. Her great-grandchildren, who published the novel 70 years later, felt the reason for its late emergence was the personal exposure of Pukhachewsky's own struggle, and the difficulties she faced in balancing family and national demands (two of her children died during her first years in *Eretz Yisrael*). They also claimed

¹ The First Aliyah is the common term for the first wave of Jewish immigration to Palestine 1881-1903. These immigrants, mostly from Eastern Europe, aspired to become pioneers and redeem the “Land of the Fathers.”

² Mimi Haskin, “Haḥ ayim vehasefer haynu hakh, sham sevel ve kan sevel” [Life and Literature are the Same, Pain Here and Pain There], *Haaretz (Sfarim)* 5 April 2002.

Pukhachewsky didn't want to appear as sabotaging the Zionist enterprise by offering a critical look at the pioneers' life.³ While Pukhachewsky's writing precedes the period discussed in this dissertation, her struggle and difficulties in publishing her work foreshadow the story of Israeli women novelists who wrote against the grain both in format and content. This dissertation will trace the journey of the early novels written by Israeli women and will examine their themes, structures and reception.

In 1994, a pioneering anthology, *Hakol ha'ah'er* [The Other Voice: Women's Fiction in Hebrew], was published in Israel. In her concluding essay, Lily Rattok, the editor, claimed that women's prose writing in Hebrew was born twice.⁴ The first birth occurred in 1903, with the publication of Dvora Baron's first story and its enthusiastic reception by the arbiters of modern Hebrew literature. The second took place in 1966, with Amalia Kahana Carmon's first short story collection. By this account, Israeli women's prose writing, and novels in particular (Baron wrote only stories or novellas and Kahana Carmon published her first novel in 1971), appeared to be few and far between. While this impression has been recently corrected,⁵ the novels written by

³ Haskin, "Haḥ ayim vehasefer"; Mor Altschuler, "Sofer einu kotev lefi hazmana" [A Writer Does not Write on Demand], *Haaretz (Tarbut vesifrut)* 25 February 2004. For more on the elements of protest and defiance in Pukhachewsky's work see Orly Lubin, *Isha koret isha* [Women Reading Women] (Haifa: Haifa University & Zmora Bitan, 2003) 101-116; and Yaffah Berlovitz, ed., *She'ani adama ve'adam* [Tender Rib: Stories by Women-Writers in Pre-State Israel] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2003) 14-32.

⁴ Lily Rattok, ed., *Hakol ha'ah'er* [The Other Voice: Women's Fiction in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1994).

⁵ Most notably in the works of Yael S. Feldman, *No Room of Their Own* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); and Berlovitz, *She'ani adama*.

Israeli women between the establishment of the State and 1966 remained primarily outside the established literary canon. More than 20 novels were published from 1948 until 1971 when Kahana Carmon's first novel appeared; this estimate does not include poetry and short story collections. Consequently, this body of work has neither been addressed within the general history of modern Hebrew literature nor within the history of women authors.

The purpose of my study is to take a closer look at the novels written by Israeli women between 1948 and 1966, and particularly at their constructions of gender and nation. The rationale for my periodization is two-fold. On the one hand, this is a standard chapter in the history of modern Hebrew literature, marked as it is by two wars, even though it includes two literary generations—the so-called *Palmach* and the State Generation writers.⁶ On the other hand, within the history of Israeli women's prose writing it demarcates the product of “female interwar novelists”—a category not recognized to date.⁷ I begin where Yaffah Berlovitz's recent anthology on women

⁶ The *Palmach* was the pre-statehood army. As Alan Mintz has noted, in the historiography of Israeli literature the ruling trend has been to “demarcate creative periods by significant historical events rather than by inherent aesthetic developments such as the first appearance of a genre, technique or theme.” See Alan Mintz, introduction, *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction* (Hanover: University Press of New England and Brandeis University Press, 1997) 6.

⁷ I thank Yael Feldman for suggesting this term. Unlike Gershon Shaked's mapping of the *Palmach* and State generations of writers, the women novelists discussed here do not necessarily belong to the same generation, yet all of them published their first novel during the time frame suggested. This grouping then demonstrates both the difficulty they had in publishing their work and their scarceness within the

writers of the first *aliyah* ends (1948), and stop before the publication of two books, which marked the debut of the “new Israeli woman writer”: the short stories of Amalia Kahana Carmon, who quickly became Israel’s most critically acclaimed woman prose writer, and the poetry of Yona Wallach, which took Israelis by surprise but “had no doubt laid the foundation for a self-conscious Israeli woman subject.”⁸ Within the suggested time frame I will focus on the following works: Yehudit Hendel’s *Reḥov hamadregot* [The Street of Steps; 1954], Naomi Fraenkel’s trilogy *Shaul veYohannah* [Saul and Yohannah; 1956-1967], Batya Kahana’s *Haḥitzim mimkha vahal’ah* [The Arrows are Beyond Thee; 1960], Shoshana Shrirra’s *Leḥem ha’ohavim* [Lovers' Bread; 1957], Rachel Eytan’s *Barakia haḥamishi* [The Fifth Heaven; 1962] and Miriam Schwartz’s *Korot Hava Gottlieb* [Eve Gottlieb; 1968].⁹ Some of these novels achieved critical as well as commercial success, while others were almost immediately marginalized. The question of why and how these works have disappeared from the literary canon will be addressed in detail and will contribute to our understanding of the mechanisms of the national-literary canonizing process.

generational outline. See Gershon Shaked, *Hasiporet ha’ivrit* [Hebrew Narrative Fiction 1880-1890], Vol. 4-5 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1993; 1998).

⁸ Feldman, *No Room* 9. For more on Wallach's influence see Zafirra Lidovsky-Cohen, “Loosen the Fetters of Thy Tongue Woman:” *The Poetry and Poetics of Yona Wallach* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2003).

⁹ Although Schwartz's novel was published after the suggested time frame, I include it here since its publication was very close to the others, and also since it belongs poetically and thematically with this group.

The six novels range in style, themes and even structure, but all of them suggest an alternative narrative within or alongside the Zionist mythos. By providing an overview of these novels, as well as the specific reading of each, this dissertation will fill in a missing link in both the history of Israeli women writers and the larger scope of Hebrew literature. I am interested in the shared thematic and poetics these authors offer, and in the similar challenges they had to face. One such challenge has certainly been their choice of genre. The novel, as postcolonial theory has taught us, often served as the reflection of the nation since “it was the novel that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the ‘one yet many’.”¹⁰ This was indeed the case in modern Hebrew literature, where the novel was the male writer’s dominion (while women were expected to write poetry and a specifically feminine and lyrical one at that).¹¹ Thus, Israeli women who chose the novel as their literary medium were doubly displaced.

THE ANXIETY OF SURVIVAL

In his grand historiography of modern Hebrew literature, Gershon Shaked has delineated, in five volumes, a hundred years of Hebrew prose writing.¹² Shaked’s main thesis in this opus is that each generation of (predominantly male) writers rose to its new status by addressing, appropriating or rejecting what he termed the *Zionist meta-*

¹⁰ Timothy Brennan, “The National Longing for Form,” *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990) 46.

¹¹ As Yael Feldman established in her work, *No Room* 3-4.

¹² Shaked, *Hasiporet* Vol. 1-5.

narrative in which fathers and sons grapple with each other over the identity of the nation.¹³ This struggle, often modeled after the oedipal revolt, came to represent a male-centered mapping of Israeli literature, echoing Harold Bloom's notion of the *anxiety of influence* in which the writer's strength depends on his destruction of his forefather.¹⁴ According to Bloom, from this angle, only the center of the canon can be read as influential: "My concern is only with the strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to death."¹⁵ This, however, doesn't seem to apply to Israeli women novelists whose anxiety became one of survival rather than influence.¹⁶

Yael Feldman's work has rectified some of Shaked's premises. Her book on Israeli women's fiction, *No Room of Their Own* (1999), maps the emergence of the "vicarious" woman subject in Israeli fiction. The study presents the foremothers of the 1980's boom in Israeli women's fiction, focusing on the genre of "masked autobiography" in which these writers displace their female protagonists and locate them elsewhere (both in time and place). Weaving her textual close readings with

¹³ Shaked, *Hasiporet* Vol 4 14-16.

¹⁴ Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

¹⁵ Bloom 5.

¹⁶ As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have already suggested regarding 19th century writers who sought their female precursors as a source of affirmation. See Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (1979; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000). Their later work suggested a competitive explanation where the few chosen women compete for the same places. This paradigm, however, seems to me to apply better to Hebrew women poets than to their prose-writing sisters.

major feminist and gender theories (from Beauvoir and Woolf to Kristeva), Feldman suggests that the novelists grapple with the notion of “androgyny” (earlier used by Virginia Woolf) as a possible answer to the androcentrism of Israeli culture.

Interestingly, Feldman shows that although the novels attempt to deconstruct common gender binaries, the heroines often fail in this mission, due to their double bind within a Jewish tradition which excluded women artists, and an Israeli ideological climate which opposed any exceptions to the Zionist meta-narrative.

Feldman’s comprehensive overview, however, focuses mostly on the 1980s surge in women’s writing, mentioning only briefly the predecessors of the five novelists she discusses. Some of these predecessors are addressed in Yaffah Berlovitz’s 2003 anthology *She’ani adama veadam* [Tender Rib: Stories by Women-Writers in Pre-State Israel]. Berlovitz claims that the forgotten story of women writers during the *Yishuv* period was a product of an “archeology of silencing” of the literary establishment. In surveying the prose writings of more than 60 women she finds that for the new Hebrew woman the revival of Zionism meant also a feminine revival. Furthermore, Berlovitz claims that if these texts were not buried by the dominating Zionist male canon, generations of Israeli women would have been raised with their own literary tradition. Following feminist theories (in particular Elaine Showalter’s notion of gynocriticism), Berlovitz treats the pre-state women writers as an autonomous poetic group. According to her, the exclusion of women writers from the

literary arena forced them to create their own national narrative, possibly giving these writers the advantage of autonomy and the ability to criticize the center.

Both Feldman and Berlovitz have significantly enriched, as well as changed, the map of women's writing in Israel. My work will fill in the gap inbetween these two studies and will uncover the lineage of Israeli women novelists who began writing after the establishment of the state, but before women's writing became a definitive voice in Israeli literature.

The reading of the first novels by women to be written in Israel, must therefore be addressed by a different yet interfacing frame of reference. In this study I offer a close reading of the novels through the concepts of gender and nation, delineating a thematic trajectory of undermining traditional gender roles by questioning the national narrative. My argument is that the protagonists of these novels struggle with questions of national identity, the Zionist ethos, and their place within it, through the prism of gender and by appropriating or rewriting their assigned roles.

ON GENDER AND NATION IN ISRAEL: THE CASE OF LITERATURE

Israeli literature is generally viewed as a natural extention of modern Hebrew literature that was written mostly in the European Diaspora since mid-18th century, thus providing the newly founded nation with a sense of continuity. While the concept of nation as an imagined entity depends on the notion of shared memories, the political sovereignty of the state requires national agencies that will justify the ideology

promoted in the name of these memories.¹⁷ Israeli literature as one such agency has actively participated over the years in shaping and defining identities. By reinscribing the historical attachment between the people and the land it has created a sense of reawakening of a shared past. Within this vision the nation was imagined as a woman, and the new Jewish man as its redeemer; thus Jewish nationalism became identified with masculinity.¹⁸

Consequently, my working hypothesis is that because of their preoccupation with gender and sexuality, the early novels written by Israeli women produce new interpretations of the national narrative. Hence, I pose several key questions in analyzing a female novelistic poetics that has been overlooked until now. My questions, informed by theories of the novel and contemporary gender and postcolonial scholarship, address the following: the treatment of the national Zionist identity in this corpus, the position of women and men within it, and the manner in which the novels resist, reclaim or reinvent the national narrative.

To begin with, I look at how nation and home (versus homeland) are reconciled (or opposed) in the novels, and whether the narrative of national identity

¹⁷ For further discussion of Nation-State relations see Stuart Allan and Andrew Thompson, "The Time-Space of National Memory" *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London: Verso, 1996) 35-49.

¹⁸ The scholarship on these issues is considerable; for some examples see: George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Tamar Mayer, ed., *Gender Ironies* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Michael Gluzman, *Haguf hatzioni* [The Zionist Body: Nationalism, Gender and Sexuality in Modern Hebrew Literature] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2007).

overrides the voice of the margin. This dissertation shows that the novels examined suggest a subversive, if subtle, construction of national identity mostly by producing an alternative protagonist to the domineering *sabra* figure of their time. They do so both structurally and thematically but often in a contradictory manner. Structurally, all the novels except one (Batya Kahana's *The Arrows*), seem to adopt either traditional formats (e.g., Naomi Fraenkel's *Bildungsroman*), or traditional high-brow Hebrew style and sophisticated linguistic register (Rachel Eytan, Shoshana Shrira, and Miriam Schwartz), thus revealing a rich subtext of Jewish and Hebrew literatures. Hence, the novelists appropriate the "father tongue," as Tova Cohen has shown, in order to participate in the literary canon of their time. The act of appropriation, and thus the accommodation of the male narrative to the female perception, allows their works to become "an inseparable part of the national 'father's culture' and at the same time part of the 'mother's culture' which pertains only to the feminine creation."¹⁹ Not all of the writers, however, go beyond the act of appropriation to reach subversion. As Hannah Naveh and Yael Feldman have argued, the appropriation act allows the subordinate to be voiced, to become a subject, while subversion goes further by denying cultural,

¹⁹ Tova Cohen, "Betoch hatarbut umeḥ tsa la: al nikhus sfat ha'av kederkh le'itsuv intellectu'ali shel dmut ha'ani hanashi" [Outside and Inside Culture: On the Appropriation of the Father's Language as a Means for an Intellectual Construction of the Feminine Self], *Sadan: Meḥkarim besifrut ivrit* [Sadan: Studies in Hebrew Literature], ed. Ziva Shamir, Vol.2 (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University Press, 1996) 69-110.

national and sexual binaries, offering a new option beyond androcentric dualities.²⁰ In Chapters 2-4 we will examine the acts of resistance manifested in each novel and the level of “reading against the grain” they reach.

Thematically, however, the interwar novelists seem to have chosen the road less taken whether they do so in openly or in a more concealed manner. Thus, two of the novels, Naomi Fraenkel’s *Shaul and Yohannah* and Rachel Eytan’s *The Fifth Heaven*, follow the coming-of-age story of a young girl, locating the sexual, artistic and national identities of their heroine at the center of the work. Other novels, Batya Kahana’s *The Arrows are Beyond Thee* and Miriam Schwartz’s *Eve Gottlieb*, explore taboo subjects, both nationally and sexually, as their heroines pursue affairs with Arab lovers. Both, however, end up with pregnancies producing, or in Schwartz’s case, refusing, a new generation of Israeli identities. Still others, Yehudit Hendel’s *The Street of Steps* and Shoshana Shrira’s *Lovers’ Bread*, examine the entangled connections between gender and nation through their male protagonists, examining the place of marginal men (Sephardi, diasporic, working-class) within the narrative of the new Jewish state. For all of them, however, the Zionist story of creating a new life and a “new individual” (read “man”) in the Land of Israel is undermined, sometimes as a

²⁰ Hannah Naveh, “Leket, pe’ah veshikheḥ a” [Life Outside the Canon], *Min migdar politika* [Sex Gender Politics: Women in Israel], eds. Dafna Izraeli et al, (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1999) 49-107; Yael Feldman, “‘A People that Dwells Alone?’ Toward Subversion of the Fathers’ Tongue in Israeli Women’s Fiction,” *Recreating the Canon*, *AJS Review* 28:1 (April 2004): 83-104.

means to highlight alternative models, and other times because it plays no major role in the characters' lives.

Similarly, the heroines of these novels stand in clear contradiction to the image of “the new Hebrew woman” cultivated by the Zionist movement.²¹ Nevertheless, it appears that in most of the novels examined here the women are nationally and ideologically active, albeit not always according to the ‘rules’ of the Zionist ethos. For example, in *Shaul and Yohannah* various women, Jewish and Christian, young and old, communist and Zionist, invade the pages of this historic saga and pave an ideological road for themselves and their families. In fact, more often than not, they are more determined to follow their political beliefs than the men surrounding them, even when they pay for their actions with their lives, their bodies, or their happiness. Yet Fraenkel's women, as well as Kahana's heroines, for example, are not uncritical of ideology and are often caught between the national demand of them as women (and especially as mothers of a new generation) and their private lives. In Eytan's *The Fifth Heaven*, Maya's coming-of-age story appropriates the hegemonic male narrative that is represented in the novel by an older man, and undermines it by reconstructing an alternative feminine subject. Thus, my reading will show how the novels often mediate between the sexual identity of the heroine and her location in relation to the national narrative.

All the writers examined here, whether writing about men or women, pay close

²¹ For more on the image of the new Israeli woman see Oz Almog, *Hatsabar* [The Sabra – A Profile] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997) 19-64.

attention to the gender roles accepted, rejected, or forced on their characters as well as to their relation to the national narrative. Some of the heroines here try to escape feminine stereotypes by assuming male personas (Kahana), or by defying family role models (Fraenkel). Others embrace their female identity and through it (rather than beyond or against it), rewrite the rules of what is and is not allowed, especially in respect to the woman as artist.²² Thus, the heroines of Eytan and Schwartz are a young writer and a painter who struggle to produce their art against all odds, and particularly against the patriarchal rule that surrounds them. By contrast, Shrira's and Hendel's male protagonists are marginalized for ethnic reasons that are strongly entangled with gender issues. As the first chapter will demonstrate, Israeli culture, which cultivated the virile, masculine image first of the *halutz* (pioneer) and then the *sabra*, rejected any other options of manhood, particularly when those were marked by ethnic, class,

²² Terry Eagleton, warns against a premature subversion of female identity—aiming to reach the “particular and polymorphous” instead of trying “somehow to go right through those estranging definitions” see Terry Eagleton, “Nationalism: Irony and Commitment,” *Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature*, eds. Terry Eagleton, Edward Said and Fredric Jameson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990) 24. Eagleton's claim fits Julia Kristeva's three phases of feminism: the demand for equality, the rejection of the male symbolic order, and finally the move to transcend gender binaries, in Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (New York: Methuen Co. Ltd., 1985) 12. The Israeli interwar women novelists are found somewhere between the second (rejecting the symbolic male order) and third (subversion of dichotomies) phases. For more on this see Chapter 1.

or diasporic signifiers. Thus, the first novels written by Israeli women provide both an interpretation as well as interruption of the gendered national narrative.²³

ADDING THE MISSING LINK

The significance of a study of the first novels by women to be written in Israel lies in two realms. First, it adds a necessary piece to the puzzle of women's writing in Israel; without it we are left only with "representative" figures of great women writers per generation.²⁴ The overview and analysis of the work of interwar women novelists will add an important link in the recently assembled chain of women's writing in Hebrew, a link that has not been addressed within the general history of modern Hebrew literature nor within the history of women authors.

Second, this added link changes the face of the formative years of the Israeli prose. A similar move for revision has already taken place in the field of poetry. In *The Politics of Canonicity*, Michael Gluzman approaches, among other subjects, the exclusion of women poets from Hebrew literary history, offering a re-mapping of their work.²⁵ Reviewing canonic historical models of Hebrew poetry, he finds them constructed by "male centered strategies of reading" and points out the need for

²³ I use interruption here in the sense of disturbing the nationalized, canonic narrative and creating shifts within it, a challenge achieved by both appropriation and subversion.

²⁴ As Elaine Showalter demonstrates in her historiography of British women novelists: *A Literature of Their Own* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977).

²⁵ Michael Gluzman, *The Politics of Canonicity: Lines of resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2003) 100-140.

revision through feminist theory “by drawing attention to the partial and patriarchal nature of literary historiography.”²⁶ In my work I would like to offer a similar reading of the early novels written by Israeli women. As the dissertation demonstrates, many of these novels foreshadowed some of the issues and themes that will preoccupy later generations, from A.B. Yehoshua to Orly Castel-Bloom. In addition, they disrupt that presumed silent division of the genres between male writers who were “awarded” the novel (and everything else) and the women who were expected, as noted earlier, to concentrate on poetry and perhaps short stories. I suggest then, that women writers chose the form of the novel as a way to produce an alternative national model, and therefore struggled against a double displacement as women and novelists. Adding these novels to the outline of the history of Israeli literature will not only expand its scope, but it will also expose competing trends and a succession of influence that evolved not out of anxiety, but through a shared struggle.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

My dissertation offers a close reading of the aforementioned six novels, employing various theories and scholarship. Chapter 1, “Writing the Novel: Gender, Nation and Canonicity,” will locate and contextualize the novels through theories of the novel, addressing the unique aspects of the genre at large, and specifically within the history of women’s writing in Israel. In the first part of this chapter, I provide a

²⁶Gluzman, *The Politics* 259.

review of major theories of the novel as a background that will explain and deepen our understanding of the authors' choice of this genre. In the second part, I briefly review the history of the novel in Hebrew literature and its much shorter version within the history of women's writing in Israel, in order to locate the works of the interwar female novelists within these histories.

Chapter 2, "Gender and Genre," broadens some of the discussion in Chapter 1 by expanding on the concept of the *Bildungsroman*. The chapter offers a close reading of Naomi Fraenkel's *Shaul veYohannah*, reading it as a feminine coming-of-age novel disguised within a patriarchal genealogical trilogy. In my reading I demonstrate how Fraenkel appropriates the masculine format of the *Bildungsroman* and combines it with the Zionist traditional narrative in order to open up a space for her heroine who undermines both gender and national norms.

Chapter 3, "The Portrait of the Woman as a Young Artist," follows three novels published during the 1960s. Rachel Eytan's, Batya Kahana's, and Miriam Schwartz's works all revolve around the narrative of the woman as artist, a sexual being and an oppressed national subject. The reading of the three novels together provides a narrative of woman from childhood to motherhood and highlights the manner in which feminine gender roles are dictated by the national demands. The novelists of this chapter manage, however, to produce ways of resistance and female subjects who defy the suffocating national narrative.

Chapter 4, “Undoing National Manhood,” looks at male characters written by women novelists. Here, the novels of Yehudit Hendel and Shoshana Shrira will be examined for masculine gender roles and the manner in which the two writers use their marginal protagonists to subvert them, as well as the national expectations of the new Jewish man. Reading these novels through the masculine prism exposes the deep connection between gender and nation that at the same time also subverts this supposedly natural relation. Questions of ethnic identities as well as socioeconomic status in relation to gender and nation will also be discussed.

The “Conclusion” will then place the novels within the history of Israeli women writers as well as, Hebrew literature at large, emphasizing their marginal position as an agency for criticism, through appropriation and sometimes subversion of the Zionist story.

CHAPTER 1

WRITING THE NOVEL: GENDER, NATION AND CANONICITY

In *The Rise of the Novel* Ian Watt examines the reasons for the emergence of the novel, and its relation to print culture and the changes in reading audiences beginning in the 18th century. By delineating the history of the novel as underscored by philosophical notions (Locke, Hume), he reaches the conclusion that both the novelist and the philosopher are interested in “the production of what purports to be an authentic account of the actual experience of individuals.”¹ Watt summarizes the three characteristics of the novel as follows: the novel rejects both formal conventions (compared with the tragedy for example) and traditional plots; the novel deals with “particular people in particular circumstances” rather than with general archetypes and, accordingly, these individuals are set against a particular background of time and place.² The novel is then a text which depicts the specific without succumbing to formal patterns. These characteristics point to the novelty of the genre and how it significantly differed from previous literary writing.

As we have seen in the introduction, choosing the novel as their literary genre presented a special challenge for Israeli women writers. In order to further comprehend this choice, what it offered these writers, how it challenged them and how novel writing relates to issues of gender, nation and canonicity, the following chapter

¹ Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (1957; London: Hogarth press, 1987) 27.

² Watt 15.

is devoted to the study of the novel from a literary theoretical angle, as well as reviewing its history within modern Hebrew literature. The theoretical framework which follows, will justify the focus on the novel as a particular genre, one which opens up a wider space (compared with other genres) for subversion and innovation. The unique qualities of the novel will be explored here according to different branches of literary theory: novel theory, gender studies and postcolonial studies. In the subsequent historical section, we will follow the story of the novel as a masculine genre within Hebrew literature, often dominated by the Zionist meta-narrative, and the place of novels written by women within (and alongside) this history. Finally, this chapter will emphasize the significance of examining the early novels written by Israeli women and will frame the readings of those novels discussed in the following chapters.

THE GENRE OF THE NOVEL

Questions of authenticity and individuality, as mentioned by Watt, are closely examined and debated in the works of two major scholars of literary theory, Georg Lukàcs and Mikhail Bakhtin. For Georg Lukàcs, “the structural categories of the novel constitutively coincide with the world as it is today.”³ Lukàcs argues that the novel

³ Georg Lukàcs, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971) 93.

seeks to uncover the hidden totality of life through form.⁴ In his essay, “The Inner Form of the Novel,” he discusses the distance between this form and reality.⁵ By comparing the novel to its precursor, the epic—a closed genre that is form-dependent and characterized by stereotypical protagonists—Lukàcs shows that the novel is in constant state of change, always located between being and becoming and cannot be easily categorized. For Lukàcs, the novel reexamines the relations between art and life: “Every art form is defined by the metaphysical dissonance of life which it accepts and organizes as the basis of totality complete in itself...the dissonance special to the novel, the refusal of the immanence of being to enter into empirical life.”⁶ Since totality can only be abstract in the novel, what becomes visible in the featured reality is the distance between form and life, this distance and in turn dissonance, according to Lukàcs, becomes the very essence of the novel. In other words, this genre aims to capture life and at the same time resists the very act of representation. Furthermore, Lukàcs claims the external form of the novel is necessarily biographical in nature because the world depicted in it can only be realized through the eyes of a character, while the character exists only through his or her relation to the world surrounding it.⁷ Thus, it is the point of view of the individual that creates a certain cohesion in the otherwise unorganized mass that is human life. More specifically, the novel reflects

⁴ For Lukàcs, who was highly influenced by Marxism, this totality meant that there could be no separation between the public and private spheres; this claim also appealed to feminist scholars as will be discussed later.

⁵ Lukàcs, 70-83.

⁶ Lukàcs, 71.

⁷ Lukàcs, 77.

“the life of the problematic individual” because only this type of protagonist may pose challenge and interest complex enough to deal with the scope and breadth of the novel.⁸ However, this biographical form, warns Lukàcs, can often adopt an ideological course where the individual experience becomes an instrument for manifesting ideas, turning the hero of the novel into a one-dimensional representation.⁹

At the same time, underlying the novel is the notion that the life it struggles to contain in form often lacks a sense of direction in its journey, unlike the pattern-ruled epic. In fact, Lukàcs defines the novel as the “epic of the world abandoned by God.”¹⁰ Lukàcs then points to irony as the coping mechanism of the modern individual who is forever distanced from nature: “In the novel the subject, as observer and creator, is compelled by irony to apply its recognition of the world to itself.”¹¹ In that sense, the epic is defined by him as “child like” because it fails to address the tension embedded in the reciprocal relationship between subject and world. The hero of the modern novel, always a man for Lukàcs who described the novel as the “form of mature virility,” must face the fact that literature does not create a reality in itself and finds himself estranged from the world surrounding him.¹² Thus, the novel becomes the text of modern crisis: if the epic is ruled by Gods, and poetry, according to Lukàcs,

⁸ Lukàcs, 78.

⁹ As was sometimes the case with the protagonists of the *Bildungsroman*. See for example Todd Curtis Kontje, *Private Lives in the Public Sphere: The German Bildungsroman as Metafiction* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University press, 1992).

¹⁰ Lukàcs, 88.

¹¹ Lukàcs 75. This is based on the notion of modernity as reflecting the move into an industrial society during the 19th century.

¹² Lukàcs 85.

belongs to the young, then for the older and perhaps disillusioned, the novel which “tells the adventure of interiority” is the only text remaining.¹³

Highly influenced by Marx, Lukàcs’ writing was no doubt ideologically driven. In that spirit, he promoted realism as a style of writing reflecting the idea that the world should be understood by uncovering its underlying rules. Lukàcs rejected the modernist writers of his times and claimed that their fragmented writing fails to represent the totality of life. In the novels examined here we can find a perfect example for realist writing in Naomi Fraenkel’s historic saga *Shaul and Yohannah*. Fraenkel, also a Marxist, aimed to uncover the very foundations of the world she examines—German Jews pre-WWII—by providing a realist (and detailed) depiction of their lives, their struggles, and most of all their contradictory ideologies. Other novelists, as we shall see, took a rather different route.

Unlike Lukàcs and Watt, Mikhail Bakhtin was not only interested in the realist novel that emerged during the 18th century, but also in a more general theory of the novel. “‘Novel’ is the name Bakhtin gives to whatever force is at work within a given literary system to reveal the limits, the artificial constraints of that system.”¹⁴ The challenge in creating a theory of the novel lies in limiting it to the categories it resists as a genre which, in Bakhtin’s opinion, parodies all other genres. Much like Lukàcs, Bakhtin sees the novel as a “genre in the making”, an ever changing format that is not

¹³ Lukàcs 89.

¹⁴ Michael Holquist, introduction, *The Dialogic Imagination*, by Mikhail Bakhtin trans. Carl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) xxxi.

subjected to conventions and the only work of literature that is fit to reflect the world surrounding us. Bakhtin's characterization of the novel is three-fold and can be summarized as follows: it is three dimensional in style and can therefore represent multi-language consciousness; it has created radical change within the literary world (the novel was the only literary genre to develop after the invention of print); and it opened up new possibilities of contact with the present. What the latter point highlights, is the manner in which the novel is closely related to other extra-literary forms of writings through its relation to social reality and ideology. For example, it may make use of (real or fictional) letters, diaries and photographs. In this work we will examine such relations in Batya Kahana's novel *Haḥitzim mimkha vahal'ah* [The Arrows are Beyond Thee] which experiments with a diary written by a woman, yet read by a man, blurring the borders between fiction and reality.

For this study I would like to stress the first characteristic of the novel which comprises of Bakhtin's concepts of *heteroglossia* and *dialogics*. The first describes the interaction—from the smallest to the largest scale—between the linguistic system and the context in which a specific utterance by a specific speaker is made. Through heteroglossia Bakhtin emphasizes the importance of time and place—the text cannot be read out of context. At the same time the text expresses a polyphony (which is a specific way of expressing heteroglossia)—a representation of varied and opposing voices. In Chapter 4 we will look at Yehudit Hendel's *Reḥov hamadregot* [The Street of Steps] and the manner in which she employs polyphony in order to subvert the

hegemony of the Zionist narrative in 1950s Israel. In a sense, the novel reproduces within itself the very linguistic tension from which it stems: “It is this capacity of the novel to assimilate such a variety of genres and speech types that makes it an important site through which wider discursive struggles are condensed and refracted.”¹⁵ But heteroglossia goes a step further beyond polyphony. It contains the struggle between what Bakhtin termed centripetal language, which moves inwards and is aesthetically oriented like poetry, and centrifugal language, which moves outwards and is rhetorically oriented like the novel; between the language of authority and hegemony and that of diversity and subversiveness. Heteroglossia can therefore manifest itself in the smallest linguistic scale of the specific utterance and in the widest discursive site which allows for contradictory voices. Like Lukàcs, Bakhtin argued that because of its ability to contain different voices the novel is different from other literary genres that “surrender” language to form, in our case this trait meant allowing for previously muted voices to suddenly be heard in the text.

Dialogics, or dialogism, suggests that no discourse is stable, and since the utterance made by a speaker is always in anticipation of a response, language and in turn literature is never monologic. Dialogism is the state of the world in heteroglossia, emphasizing the constant interaction between discourses and meanings. Therefore the text always bears multiple meanings even when some are hidden or silenced. If

¹⁵ Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995) 40.

novelistic narration is dialogic (and thus heteroglossic) it opens up a site of resistance that undermines monologic and centralized language. The novel de-centers the ideological world and creates a “linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness” rather than a unified, ideological medium.¹⁶ This notion of the literary text as conducting a dialogue and uncovering hidden voices, has particularly appealed to feminist scholars, who found both Lukàcs and Bakhtin’s theories to be useful tools in reading for women’s literary (mis)representations. In this sense, Bakhtin’s argument that only the novel “dramatizes the gaps that always exist between what is told and the telling of it” will be explored in the following chapters.¹⁷ This dissertation will trace the gaps between the (masculine) genre chosen by Israeli women novelists, emphasizing its relation to national identity, and the subversive content which simultaneously undermines it.

As noted earlier, with the emergence of feminist scholarship Bakhtin's ideas were reevaluated and employed by such scholars.¹⁸ One of the main issues occupying feminist research is the gap between the private and public spheres and their gendering, and thus Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic was seen as a manner of bringing the two domains into dialogue. According to Diane Price Herndl, both Bakhtin and theorists of feminine language (mostly from the French feminist school) “describe a

¹⁶ Dentith 44.

¹⁷ Holquist xxviii.

¹⁸ Bakhtin himself did not deal with women writers in his writings and cannot be "suspected" of feminism.

multivoiced or polyphonic resistance to hierarchies.”¹⁹ Following Bakhtin, *feminist dialogics* clears a space for dialogue between the masculine public language and the feminine private one. The novel in particular, as a dynamic, polyvocal genre, allows the exposure of the resistance to dominant discourse and the conflict between the patriarchal and the private. In the case of Israeli women novelists the choice of genre may have offered freedom—in breadth, in style and in theme—but it also posed a threat to the ruling Zionist-masculine canon, thus marginalizing its female authors. This double-edged sword led different writers in different directions which will be explored in the next three chapters.

GENDER AND GENRE: THE NOVEL FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

In *A Literature of Their Own* Elaine Showalter argues that: “As novelists, women have always been self-conscious, but only rarely self-defining” by neglecting to address their collective history.²⁰ My analysis throughout this study will rely on gender and feminist theories, which derive from a broad range of disciplines (sociology, psychology, linguistics). In general, feminist literary criticism seeks to correct, undermine, supplement and change the predominantly male-dominated literary canon, and the critical perspective that shapes it. Employing a feminist reading does not only expose the politicization of the process of canonization but also, as Orly

¹⁹Diane Price Herndl, “The Dilemmas of a Feminine Dialogic,” *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, eds. Dale M Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991) 8.

²⁰Showalter, *A Literature* 4.

Lubin argues, produces a rereading “which is an aware and deliberate radical act with a declared purpose to expose the manipulative norms of the text which exclude women.”²¹ Thus, if women’s fiction, particularly as part of the history of modern Hebrew literature, is only addressed within the canon, we ignore an entire body of work which offers different narratives than the dominant Zionist male story. Some of these works are subversive in nature, suggesting a critique and opposition to ruling norms, while others go a step beyond by offering an alternative delineation of the national tale.²²

The question of the novel as a chosen genre of women writers is particularly significant for what we call today the American School of feminism. Scholars such as Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have uncovered and delineated the heritage of women writers (mostly in prose), treating women’s fiction as a category on its own. They were mostly interested in questions of authorship, subversion of patriarchal conventions and the critical reception of “women’s writing as the product of a subculture, evolving with relation to a dominant mainstream.”²³ Within these studies it was the novel which took center stage in the emerging literary trend of women writers, and while the choice of novel was much more natural for English and American novelists, and much less so for their Israeli colleagues, observations following the feminist American School will resonate throughout this dissertation in

²¹ Lubin, *Isha koret isha* 64.

²² This is not to say, of course, that there are not any subversive male writers; their works, however, are beyond the scope of this dissertation.

²³ Showalter, *A Literature* xiii.

terms of outlining the female interwar corpus. To open up the possibilities of discussion and analysis of these works we must first delineate their poetics as well as content within the Israeli canon by addressing issues of genre and reception. Hence, the writings of the French School will not be elaborated on here, although they will be referred to in specific readings of the novels, as these scholars dealt more with the notion of feminine writing from a linguistic point of view and did not address the genre of the novel as a direct issue in their work.

Scholars of women's literature argue that the history of women's writing, has suffered, until recently, from several problems.²⁴ First, it was reduced to the representative "great writers", the selected few women writers who were "allowed" into the canon. This phenomenon was prevalent in the history of modern Hebrew literature where we find Dvora Baron, Leah Goldberg and Amalia Kahana Carmon playing the role of "token" women writers, while many others have gone unnoticed or were bluntly ignored by the literary milieu.²⁵ Without the minor novelists, claims Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own*, we're unable to see the links between the writers and they remain isolated cases. Second, as Mary Ellman showed in her seminal work, the study of women's writing has been infected with stereotypes and

²⁴ Most notably Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* and Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman*, but also later research done by scholars like Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). In Israel, see Yael S. Feldman, *No Room*; Hannah Naveh, "Leket pe'ah"; and Yaffah Berlovitz, *She'ani 'adama*.

²⁵ As has been recently shown in Yaffah Berlovitz's, *She'ani adama*.

prejudice.²⁶ As Ellman ironically points out, there is “a repeated association of women with nature and of men with art. In fact, this familiar sexual conception accounts for several of the most amiable stereotypes. As long as the two basic equations can be kept quite clear of each other, good will can prevail.”²⁷ Women writers had to struggle, therefore, for a position within the literary canon which meant abiding by its rules, while at the same time aspiring for some form of self-representation where their voices have been traditionally muted.

In mapping a female tradition of the English novel as a form of subculture (and not as an innate consciousness as French feminists have argued), Showalter divided this history into three periods: the feminine period of imitation and internalization of the dominant male literary tradition; the feminist period of revolting against this very tradition by subverting or attacking it and also by seeking a female audience; and the female phase which suggests self-discovery and an independent literary production free of both imitation and protest. Not surprisingly, Showalter’s phases match those of feminist awareness, from the demand for equality, to the rejection of the symbolic order, to the subversion of feminine/masculine dichotomies.²⁸ While the writings of Israeli women novelists cannot be so neatly divided, the different novels discussed here explore and exploit these various stages, sometimes representing more than one. Moreover, Showalter defines women’s writing as always bi-textual since it is

²⁶ Mary Ellman, *Thinking About Women* (London: Virgo, 1979).

²⁷ Ellman, 61.

²⁸ See note 22 in the Introduction.

influenced by both the canonical masculine literature and by the muted feminine literary tradition. This notion plays an interesting role in the Israeli case where the canon was often guided by ideology and a history of wars in which women played a marginal role. Yet, the very fact that in the interwar period discussed in this dissertation more than 20 novels were published by women, suggests that their writing occurred against the stream, managing to voice a muted heritage, similar to the one argued for by Showalter. Reading through these early attempts at establishing a female novelist tradition will no doubt shed light on today's busy literary scene of Israeli women writers.

In their influential work *The Mad Woman in the Attic* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar focused on questions of authority. Countering Harold Bloom's renowned *The Anxiety of Influence*, where he claims (as described in the introduction) that male authors sought to metaphorically kill their literary fathers in order to form their own identity, Gilbert and Gubar argue that in the case of women writers things turned out quite differently. Reading 19th century English literature, Gilbert and Gubar contend that as authors, women had no real precursors to struggle with and that their protest was aimed at the patriarchal tradition which suffocated their creative efforts. "If a pen is a metaphorical penis, with what organ can females generate texts?" they ask in their opening chapter.²⁹ In their work they find that women writers suffered from the "anxiety of authorship" where hardly any precursors were to be found and writing

²⁹ Gilbert and Gubar 7.

becomes an isolating act. The battle of the woman writer becomes against, not her precursors whether female or male, but the image of herself as epitomized in patriarchal literature. Choosing novels as their main genre, women managed to both find an outlet for their creativity and a tool of criticism and protest although these were often well hidden, either under male pen names (George Eliot), or by creating “submerged meanings, meanings hidden within or behind the more accessible, ‘public’ content of their works.”³⁰ Hence, Gilbert and Gubar characterize their writings as “palimpsests” in the sense that these authors needed to conceal their anger and protest and managed to do so in extremely sophisticated ways.³¹ One such way, as the title of their book suggests, was to produce the figure of the madwoman in the attic, the mad mirror image which allowed women writers to reflect their own sense of anxiety and fragmentation. While these images are less prevalent in the works of Israeli women novelists, Gilbert and Gubar’s work reveal an interesting point regarding novels which in English literature were considered commercial and entertaining, may have offered women more room for experimentation and subversion (when compared, for example, with the rigid rules of certain poetry).³² Furthermore, their notion of anguish relates quite closely to the Israeli case where the anxiety was

³⁰ Gilbert and Gubar 72.

³¹ Palimpsest writing is evident to some extent in the novels discussed in this dissertation when we examine how the national narrative is challenged by them.

³² See discussion of “masked autobiographies” in Feldman, *No Room*.

more of survival than influence.³³ Because the first Israeli women novelists were few and far between, often isolated in terms of a literary community, they simply fought to write and publish their work rather than attacking past literary shadows. In fact, many of the writers that will be discussed in this dissertation have published only one or two novels and stopped. The reasons for this phenomenon will be closely examined.

Nancy Armstrong has also focused mostly on 19th century English literature and examines in her work the link between the domestic novel, which portrayed the family-private sphere, and the rise of the middle-class.³⁴ She claims that even though the domestic novels—written by women with a female audience in mind—often focused on courtship and marriage, avoiding the political events of their times, they still possess a clear political history of their own within the history of the novel. Armstrong argues that through the unthreatening position of the domestic sphere this fiction “could represent an alternative form of political power without appearing to contest the distribution of power that it represented as historically given.”³⁵ Feminine experience and discourse in these novels was read, of course, as subjective and personal (rather than universal and philosophical) but it still produced what Armstrong

³³ Gilbert and Gubar’s later work suggested a competitive explanation where the few chosen women compete for the same places. This paradigm, however, seems to me to describe Hebrew women poets more than their prose writing sisters; see also Hamutal Tsamir, *Beshem hanof: le’umiyut, migdar vesubyektiviyut bashirah hayisr’aelit beshnot haḥ’amishim vehashishim* [In the Name of the Land: Nationalism, Subjectivity, and Gender in the Israeli Poetry of the Statehood Generation] (Jerusalem: Keter, 2006).

³⁴ Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic*.

³⁵ Armstrong 29.

calls a “cultural strategy” which challenged the dominant order that relied on the definition of what is female. Since modern culture “depends on a form of power that works through language—and particularly the printed word—to constitute subjectivity.”³⁶ Novels, as a by-product of the print revolution, became the natural grounds to create both conforming and subverting female subjects. Consequently, Armstrong sets out to prove how female subjectivity was first shaped in novels in general, and the domestic novel in particular, “before it provided the semiotic of nineteenth century poetry and psychological theory.”³⁷ Relevant examples in this study will be the works of Batya Kahana and Miriam Schwartz which were clearly marked by the critics as minor romance or sensational novels, but as my reading here will demonstrate, offered a surprisingly blunt critique of Zionist ideology, perhaps more openly than their canonized counterparts.

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND THE NOVEL

Israeli women writers who chose the novel as their genre had to deal with another important aspect of it, namely the reciprocal relation between the novel and the nation. As a growing number of scholars have shown in the past two decades, the novel often serves as the reflection of the nation, its protagonist that of national

³⁶ Armstrong 25.

³⁷ Armstrong 14.

identity, especially when it is new and still forming.³⁸ For that reason, the study of the novel is also closely related to postcolonial theory. The term postcolonial has come to represent today an array of meanings and interpretations. Literally standing for “after colonial rule,” the hyphenated term currently covers very different, sometimes contradictory, components and has had a whole gamut of theoretical models produced in its name. As a critical tool, postcolonial theory exposes power relations between center and periphery, offers a revision of hegemonic canons, and examines the arena of the nation from the standpoint of its margins. In this chapter, however, I will only address what is relevant to the genre of the novel, although various aspects will be employed later in the discussion of individual novels. Not surprisingly, postcolonial theory and feminist studies share a similar trajectory.³⁹ The three phases of feminism, as described earlier, are mirrored in the postcolonial theoretical shift from the history of colonized societies, to a (mostly) literary theory, to a broad theoretical paradigm.⁴⁰ Today, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class have become the new lenses through which nationalism (among other issues) is read. These categories which cannot be discussed separately raise important questions of power and representation

³⁸ David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) ; Timothy Brennan “The National Longing,” 44-70.

³⁹ See for example Bill Aschroft, Griffith Gareth, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back* (London & New York: Routledge, 1989); Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995); and Bill Aschroft, Griffith Gareth, and Helen Tiffin eds., *Key Concepts in Post Colonial Studies* (New York & London: Routledge, 1998).

⁴⁰ As most of the studies cited above acknowledge.

and will therefore serve as major axis along which the novels discussed in this study will be examined.

“The study of national traditions is the first and most vital stage of the process of rejecting the claims of the center to exclusivity,” write Bill Aschroft, Griffith Gareth and Helen Tiffin in *The Empire Writes Back*.⁴¹ Central to the investigations of postcolonial theory is, then, the question of nation. Perhaps the most well-known definition of nationalism addressed, rephrased, and debated today is that of Benedict Anderson in his seminal *Imagined Communities*.⁴² According to Anderson, the nation is imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”⁴³ While mythologizing the nation often meant

⁴¹ Aschroft et al, *The Empire* 17.

⁴² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

⁴³ Anderson 6. Some of Anderson’s arguments were contested, most notably by Anthony Smith in “The Origins of Nation,” *Becoming National*, eds. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 105-130. For a survey of various critiques see also Mark Hamilton, “New Imaginings: The Legacy of Benedict Anderson and Alternative Engagements of Nationalism,” *Studies in Ethnicities and Nationalism* Vol. 6, 3 (2006): 73-89. In the Jewish case there is certainly weight to Smith’s description of the national sentiment as based on “a feeling of kinship, of the extended family, that distinguishes national from every other kind of group sentiment” (106), as Yael Feldman argues in “The Most Exalted Symbol for Our Time? Rewriting Isaac in Tel Aviv,” *Hebrew Studies* 47 (2006): 253-273. For the purpose of this dissertation, however, I prefer Anderson’s imagined national construct and its deep affiliation with the novel, as well as a tool for undermining the familial model (itself a fictional construct as Pierre Bourdieu has shown), thus allowing women to enter the national narrative as well as challenging gender boundaries. For more on the connection between gender and nation in this sense see Anne McClintock, “Family

relying on some obscure shared past creating a sense of continuity, nationalism also set out to break free of past traditions (particularly imperialist and colonial), to ultimately form the model of the nation-state. Anderson's definition allowed scholars to treat the nation as a theoretical concept thus undermining any sense of authenticity. For Anderson, this concept became synonymous with myth, perpetuated in print culture, which produced and reproduced national symbols and blurred the boundaries between the public and the private. More specifically, he views the novel as the prime literary genre for imagining a shared community and for creating “a precise analogue of the idea of a nation.”⁴⁴

Following Anderson, Timothy Brennan argues that culture and nationalism are closely entwined. In his essay "The National Longing for Form" Brennan demonstrates how literature, and particularly the novel, serves as one "print media" which participates not only in the formation of the state, but also in the "myths of nations," as he terms his subject.⁴⁵ While Anderson focuses on “print-capitalism, which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways,” Brennan is more concerned with the ways this print industry is filtered through a cultural-national

Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family,” *Feminist Review* 44 (Summer 1993): 61-80; and Andrew Parker et al., introduction, *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 1-18.

⁴⁴ Anderson 26.

⁴⁵ Brennan “The National Longing.”

canon, providing a hegemonic narrative.⁴⁶ If the nation is imagined, claims Brennan, the novel allowed people to imagine it. The novel not only depicted its story, but also mimicked "the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles."⁴⁷ The tale of the protagonist becomes the blueprint of the collective, a narrative of identification. In the Israeli case, reading novels written by women begs the question—what happens when the hero becomes a heroine? Which "narrative of identification" does she produce and for whom? This question will resonate in the next two chapters where we will encounter such heroines and their struggle for representation.

Other scholars have taken the symbolic affiliation between novel and nation a step further. In *Nation and Narration* Homi Bhabha suggests treating the nation as an ongoing narrative: "to encounter the nation as it is written displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, overdetermined process by which textual meaning is produced through the articulation of difference in language."⁴⁸ This approach emphasizes the nature of the nation as ambivalent and made up of competing and contradictory trends, including the tension between public and private, rather than a unified concept, thus diffusing the assumed relation between literature and nation where the first supposedly reflects the interests of the second. A

⁴⁶ Anderson 36.

⁴⁷ Brennan, "The National Longing." 49. Brennan is clearly influenced here by Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia.

⁴⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, ed. "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990): 2.

similar approach is taken by Neil Larsen.⁴⁹ Writing on Latin American literature, Larsen argues that most scholars adopt the view that the nation demands articulation through literature and other art forms while ignoring the idea that “the nation is, in the end, *nothing but narration* in itself.”⁵⁰ In the first sense the literature mediates between the state and the national subject, and in the second it is internal to the subject and its search for a fixed identity.

Whether nation is produced, represented, or is identical with literary texts, and specifically with the novel, questions of authorship still remain. If literature serves as a national agent, who is authorized to deliver or configure national identity? Even if the nation can be viewed as a text in itself, who are its authors? These questions naturally redirect us to issues of canonicity and the place of Israeli women novelists in relation to the literary (national) canon, and their choice of novels as a ground for participating in or bypassing this very canon. In the next section we will briefly review the (canonized) history of the Hebrew novel and the short history of women writers within it.

⁴⁹ Neil Larsen, *Reading North by South* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

⁵⁰ Larsen, 143; This is particularly true for “Israel” which was written about and longed for long before it actually existed; see also Yigal Schwartz, *Hayada’ata et ha’aretz sham halimon poreah* [Do You Know the Land Where the Lemon Blooms: Human Engineering and Landscape Conceptualization in Hebrew Literature] (Tel Aviv: Kinneret, Znmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2007).

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE ISRAELI NOVEL

The history of the Hebrew novel corresponds to the emergence of modern Hebrew literature and hence with the materialization of a new national identity. If the nation strives towards a “national consciousness” and shared culture, as many contemporary definitions of nationalism suggest, then it is significant to look closely at what is considered part of this culture, what is accepted and rejected by it— what makes up the national canon.⁵¹ In assessing Shai Agnon’s novelistic work, Dan Miron pointed to the “foreignness” of the genre, where “a fundamental cultural and aesthetic gap was created between it [the novel] and ... authentic Jewish literary tradition.”⁵² Nevertheless, as Miron argues, the novel fit perfectly with the new Jewish national ambitions expressed within Hebrew literature. Before looking at the early novels written by Israeli women, a short review of the canonic (and male-centered) novels that shaped and determined this literature is in order. This survey will be addressed throughout the dissertation as a means to locate women’s novels in relation to it as well as the manner in which they challenge the Hebrew literary canon.

Shalom Avramovitch, or Mendele the Bookseller, is considered the grandfather of Modern Hebrew literature.⁵³ In works such as *Sefer hakabtzanim* [The Beggars

⁵¹ See for example discussion in Terry Eagleton, “Nationalism: Irony and Commitment” 23-39.

⁵² Dan Miron “Al biyuto shel haganer hazar” [On the Domestication of the Foreign Genre] *Sh. Y. Agnon: Critical Essays on His Writing*, ed. Avinoam Barshai (Tel Aviv: The Open University, 1991) 397-420.

⁵³ See for example Shaked, *Hasiporet* Vol. 1 26-27. Early attempts at writing the Hebrew novel were made during the *Haskalah* (Hebrew Enlightenment) in Europe

Book; 1869] and *Mas'ot Binyamin hashlishi* [The Travels of Benjamin the Third; 1878], Mendele laid the foundations of the modern Hebrew novel and the beginning of the new *Tehiyah* period which symbolized, as the name suggests, the awakening of a new Jewish identity, one that is grounded in a national rather than religious context. Fiction writers like Mordecai Ze'ev Feilerberg, Michah Yosef Berdichevski, Uri Nissan Gnessin, and Yosef Haim Brenner created the *talush*, the tormented figure of a former Yeshiva student encountering modern life and its challenges. This figure was, on the one hand, an emblem of the national initiation narrative, marked by an oedipal conflict that would dominate the history of modern Hebrew literature for decades to come, while, on the other hand he suffered from sexual and national impotence.⁵⁴ The *talush*, however, was usually the protagonist of short stories and novellas. Aside from Berdichevski's 1921 novel *Miriam* (which traces the intellectual odyssey journey of a young woman!) the novel was not a significant genre for these writers.⁵⁵

Hebrew literature's most conflicted novelist, Shai Agnon (1887-1970), was probably its greatest one too. His works were often characterized by critics as following modern man's conflict between modernity and tradition, and although he

which lasted roughly from the 1770s to the 1880s. This literature, however, was characterized by a didactic tone which relied heavily on biblical language and was mostly determined to prove that literary prose can be written in Hebrew.

⁵⁴ See Shaked, *Hasiporet*, Vol. 4, 14-19.

⁵⁵ Hebrew literature was also written elsewhere—in Palestine, where a genre of *Eretz Yisra'el* writing has developed. Some of these writers, like Moshe Smilanski, Yehuda Burla and Haim Hazaz, published novels. Most of these, however, were not critically acclaimed nor have they strongly impacted the struggling Hebrew literary scene.

struggled with the novel it attracted him “because it was a modern narrative which argues for the comprehensive understanding of reality.”⁵⁶

The first decade of *Israeli* literature, dominated by the *Palmach* generation, was characterized by a series of realist novels dealing almost exclusively with the image of the “New Hebrew Man”. This was also the period when most of the novels discussed here were published and as such it merits attention. The *Palmach* writers (mostly born during the 1920s) were often native *sabras* who were either born in Palestine or immigrated to it at a young age. They spoke fluent Hebrew and actively participated in the struggles of the *Yishuv*. Their most formative experience was Israel’s war of Independence (1947-1948) which claimed many of these young lives. Some of the *Palmach* authors chose the first person plural, representing the voice of the collective, a rhetoric which enraged some of their contemporaries but mostly the writers of the generation that followed. Their greatest critic, Baruch Kurzweil, insisted that writers like Moshe Shamir, Nathan Shaham and Aharon Megged “are self-prisoners, prisoners of their own world, and they can barely see something other than their generation.”⁵⁷ Today’s scholarship, however, has demonstrated that the *Palmach* literature was less cohesive and ideological than it first appeared and that many of its well-known works projected an ambivalent tone.

⁵⁶ Dan Miron “Al biyuto,” 417.

⁵⁷ Baruch Kurzweil, *Sifrutenu haḥadasha—hemshekiut ‘o maḥapekha?* [Our New Literature—Continuity or Revolution?] (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1971) 57.

One such work was Moshe Shamir's 1947 novel *Hu halakh basadot* [He Walked in the Fields] which became the major book of his generation. The novel follows Uri, a young, handsome, and popular kibbutz *sabra*. Suicidal and melancholy over his parents' separation and his oedipal inferiority complex, Uri nevertheless became—in the Israeli collective memory—a generational hero, and his character was remembered and commemorated mostly for its rugged charm, self-assurance, and willingness—on the surface—to sacrifice his life for the national cause.⁵⁸

This period may be said to end in 1958 with S. Yizhar great epic *Yemei ziklag* [The Days of Ziklag], an over 1000 page novel which follows a week in one platoon's life during the War of Independence. Unlike some of his colleagues, Yizhar's style leaned more towards the “stream of consciousness” writing and his works have often dealt with the moral dilemmas of war and occupation. Other writers such as Benjamin Tammuz and Pinchas Sadeh, and some of the women novelists that will be discussed in this dissertation, began publishing alternative models to the Zionist one.⁵⁹ Their works can be seen as located on the brink of a new literary era where the conventions of the *Palmach* literature were opposed and rejected.

⁵⁸ See for example Michael Gluzman, “Ha'estetika shel haguf hamerutash” [The Aesthetics of the Dismembered Body: On the Culture of Death in *He Walked in the Fields*] *Sadan: Meḥkarim be-sifrut 'Ivrit* [Sadan: *Studies in Hebrew Literature*], eds. Hannah Naveh and Oded Menda-Levi, Vol 5 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2002) 347-377.

⁵⁹ By separating the oedipal conflict from the national narrative (Tammuz), or by exploring mysticism (Christianity included) as a philosophical option (Sadeh).

During the 1960s, a second generation of authors, including A.B. Yehoshua, Amos Oz, and Amalia Kahana Carmon, created what Gershon Shaked termed the “new wave” in Israeli literature. These authors, usually referred to as the “state generation,” were often native Israelis who were examining their now established state with critical eyes and whose criticism, nevertheless, is often anticipated by the women novelists discussed here. The revolution in prose followed, as is often the case in Hebrew literature, a new movement in poetry which called—under the leadership of Nathan Zach—for the individual voice. They turned to the anti-hero, and to the allegorical, sometimes fantastic narrative, out of disappointment with the Zionist dream and with the literary models of the former generation, often undermining the very notion of national identity.⁶⁰ The state generation authors vehemently opposed the collective voice unless as a form of parody (as in Amos Oz's first stories). Their writing often depicted states of alienation, loneliness and lack of guiding ideology and alluded, stylistically, to the generation of the so-called “grandfathers”—the *Tehiyah* authors.⁶¹ These were, however, the years of short stories and novellas; most of the prominent writers of this time, A.B. Yehoshua, Amalia Kahana Carmon, Aharon Appelfeld, and others, published their first novel, only a decade later, in the 1970s.⁶²

⁶⁰ See also discussion in Shaked, *Hasiporet* Vol. 5 30-104.

⁶¹ Nurit Gertz, *Hirbet hiz'a vehaboker shelemoharat* [Generation shift in Literary History: Hebrew Narrative Fiction in the Sixties] (Tel Aviv: Porter Institute, 1983).

⁶² Some exceptions were Yehoshua Kenaz who published his first novel *Aharei ha'agim* [After the Holidays] in 1964 and Amos Oz's first novel *Makom aher* [Another Place] in 1966.

Most importantly, writers of the state generation expanded their works to include the Other, from women, to Holocaust survivors, to Sephardi Jews and Arabs. However, more often than not, this Other is encountered from the perspective of the *sabra*—the “authentic” Israeli—as formulated by the former generation and their narrative remained within the Zionist model as founded by their predecessors.⁶³ Meanwhile, the same marginal groups depicted in these works began voicing their own story, often protesting their political and cultural under-representation in Israel. Such was the case with the new Mizrahi writers like Shimon Ballas and Sami Michael, who turned back to the realist novel as a means of social protest. On a smaller scale a similar move began within women’s writing, first in poetry and later with more gusto in prose. Earlier attempts of women novelists to produce alternative narratives will be outlined next.

A (VERY) SHORT HISTORY OF HEBREW WOMEN NOVELISTS

As we can see from the short survey above, the (his) story of the Hebrew novel is male-centered and nationally oriented. From the image of the *talush*, through the *halutz*, the *sabra*, and the rebellious son, these novels struggled with national identity questions through the image of the young man. This is a story of a newly formed literature which is profusely entangled with its national-historical context. Israeli

⁶³ See Yael S. Feldman, “The ‘Other Within’ in Israeli Fiction,” *Middle East Review* 22:1 (Fall 1989): 47-53; idem, “Whose Story Is It, Anyway? Psychology and Ideology in the Representation of the Shoah in Israeli Literature,” *Probing the Limits of Representation*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1992) 223-239, 380-384.

literature, by re-inscribing the historical attachment between the people and the land has created a sense of re-awakening, in the words of Benedict Anderson, “something deep-down always known”.⁶⁴ In Israel, where the myth of the nation was often represented through the rhetoric of militarism, “an almost exclusively male cult of heroism has developed,” thus identifying nationalism with masculinity.⁶⁵ When we begin to look at the early novels to be written by women in Israel we must wonder, then, where does their work fit in? Do they embrace or reject the national-masculine model and what new light, if any, do they shed on the story of Israeli identity in their novels?

“A major literature is established as such precisely by the virtue of its claim to representative status, of its claim to realize the autonomy of the individual subject... [so] that the individual subject becomes universally valid and archetypal,” claims David Lloyd in his introductory essay to *Nationalism and Minor Literature*.⁶⁶ For Lloyd, nationalism becomes not only a political movement but also a form of cultural hegemony. The literary canon plays a key role within it by maintaining what Lloyd terms “ideology of bourgeois individualism.” While nationalism is often associated with independence and separatism, it paradoxically maintains imperialist assumptions such as preserving a reigning canon. National writing, argues Lloyd, necessarily equals a major literature which is directed towards the production of an autonomous

⁶⁴ Anderson 196.

⁶⁵ Mayer, *Gender Ironies* 11.

⁶⁶ David Lloyd, *Nationalism and Minor Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) 19.

identity. This identity is part of the national project that aims to produce a model of collective identification. In literature, the *Bildungsroman*, an educational novel where the main protagonist is initiated into society through struggle and development, is one pertinent example which was appropriated as reflecting the national narrative. Lloyd's idea of major versus minor literatures derives from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's work on Kafka and minor literature.⁶⁷ But while for Deleuze and Guattari a minor literature is characterized first and foremost by its form and language, Lloyd expands this idea to include issues of identity and origin. For him, minor literature is not only one which remains in opposition to the canon, but also a narrative which refuses both an autonomous-separate identity and the recovery of national origins. As we shall now see, such is often the case with the novels written by women, within and alongside the canonic Zionist narrative demarcating the history of modern Hebrew literature.

If the history of the Hebrew novel is a short one, then the history of the novels written by women has been barely footnoted by literary historians.⁶⁸ As demonstrated in the Introduction, the history of women writers within Hebrew literature, and that of novelists in particular, is a short and rather painful one. This history was preceded by a meager attention to female heroines in the men's literature as well. In 1905, Menahem Mendel Feitelson, a literary critic, published an essay titled "The Self Liberated

⁶⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

⁶⁸ For example, Hebrew literature's most comprehensive history is the one written by Gershon Shaked. Only 5 women were individually acknowledged in his work, 3 of them are poets. The rest are merely footnoted or ignored. On attempts to rectify this see Feldman, *No Room* and Berlovitz, *She'ani 'adama*.

Woman in Our Literature” in the journal *Hazman*.⁶⁹ The literature that Feitelson was referring to was of the Hebrew *Haskalah* period. His essay opens with the declaration that the most important event of his time is the liberation of women in general and of Jewish women in particular. However, he cannot find clear evidence for this phenomenon in the *Haskalah* literature. In fact, Feitelson quickly concludes that most male writers did not allow their female heroines to break free of their subordinate position in society. It is not enough, then, to produce radical protagonists, claims Feitelson, but the writers also have the responsibility of providing them with psychological motives, thus providing a more comprehensive understanding of modern women.

This “feminist” reading, within a predominantly traditional Jewish world, provides interesting insights on the location of women in modern Hebrew literature. While female characters began to emerge, as Feitelson conveys, they were still playing a minor role. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that “the woman question” was present in the writers’, critics’ and intellectuals’ consciousness. One of the first Jewish women writers to write prose was Dvora Baron (1887-1956), but she wrote mostly short stories and novellas and although two of her novellas were bound together in 1970 into the novel *Hagolim* [The Exiles] she did not truly engage in this genre.⁷⁰ Another

⁶⁹ M.M. Feitelson, “Ha’isha hamishtaḥ reret besifrouteinu” [The Self Liberated Woman in Our Literature] *Hazman* 7 (July 1905). Rpt. In *Mikan* 1, (May 2000): 144-150.

⁷⁰ Tova Cohen and Smuel Feiner have recently published parts of a novel written by Sara Funer in 1881, but this relatively unknown text will not be discussed here. See *Kol alma ‘ivria* [The Voice of a Hebrew Maiden] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad,

writer from the beginning of the 20th century was Nehama Pukhachewsky who published short stories during her life but the only novel she wrote, *Bamidron* [Downhill] was published, as we have seen in the Introduction, posthumously only in 2004. It took 25 more years, following Feitelson emotional plea for women characters, for the work of a woman novelist to reach the light of day.

Ironically, the first Hebrew novel to be published by a woman was actually written by a young Russian-Christian poet whose affinity with the Jewish intellectual milieu of her time steered her towards writing in Hebrew. Elisheva Bichovsky (1888-1949) became interested in Judaism at the beginning of the 20th century and started learning Hebrew by 1913. In 1920 she married Shimon Bichovsky, an avid Zionist, and began writing her poetry in Hebrew; by 1925 they immigrated to Eretz Yisrael. Elisheva never converted, however, and made sure this fact was well known. Perhaps it was her different background and upbringing which enabled her to publish her first novel and succeed where other women writers failed.

Bichovsky's only novel *Simta'ot* [Alleys, 1929], follows the story of Ludmila, a young Russian poet who has several affairs with different men in her life. The novel focuses on Bohemian life in 1920s Moscow creating, as Gershon Shaked termed it, "a Russian novel written in Hebrew."⁷¹ Among Ludmila's many admirers is her Hebrew

2006); and also the recently published Hava Shapira, *Behikansi 'ata* [While Entering Now], eds. Carole Balin and Wendy Zieler (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2008). Although Shapira did not write a novel, her prolific and feminist writing adds a valuable layer to the history of women's writing.

⁷¹ Shaked, *Hasiporet* Vol. 3 92.

teacher Daniel Roiter who passionately reads her Bialik's poetry but fails—to Ludmila's dismay—to follow the poet's cry for national revival. While he seems to be the one man she truly cares for in the novel, Ludmila is apparently drawn to Judaism as much as she is to him: "There is something great in him, great and hidden which he zealously guards from foreign eyes...and until I enter the heart of this, I shall not love him."⁷² Eventually, Ludmila decides to move to Paris and try her luck there. In her own life, Elisheva always remained at the very threshold of Judaism, claims Hillel Barzel, never fully belonging to the people she followed.⁷³ Elisheva's novel was not well received when first published. One critic wrote, for example, that "[unfortunately] a woman's touch is hardly apparent," and that Elisheva's aimless characters "are of little interest even for the broken and defeated individual."⁷⁴ Contemporary scholarship views her writing as an achievement in terms of her usage of Hebrew, but generally belittles her (feminine) style, arguing that "Elisheva's writing never leaves the domain of the heart as a source of impression and expression."⁷⁵ One exception was a review in 1977 (when the novel was reissued with introduction and comments), where a critic wondered what would have happened if the generation of writers in the 1940s and 1950s had read Elisheva: "Would they still

⁷² Elisheva Bichovsky, *Simta 'ot* [Alleys] (1929; Tel Aviv: Hadar, 1977).

⁷³ Hillel Barzel, afterword, *Simta 'ot* [Alleys], by Elisheva Bichovsky (1929; Tel Aviv: Hadar, 1977) 280-295.

⁷⁴ D.A. Friedman, "Simta'ot," *Moznaim* 9 (August 1929).

⁷⁵ Barzel. Similar comments are made by Shaked, *Hasiporet* Vol. 3 91-93.

stutter so much in their attempts to write psychological and social novels?”⁷⁶ Yet, Elisheva achieved something in her novels which the other writers of her time—namely Brenner and Gnessin whom she mentions often in her letters—only hinted at. She openly describes sexual desires and romantic encounters of and between both sexes. What the tormented characters in Gnessin’s—very Russian—stories could only fantasize about, Elisheva’s men and women openly seek. This type of sexual openness was rare for writers at the time, especially for women. Dvora Baron for example, censored her earlier stories both because of their erotic elements and overt sexuality, and perhaps also because they offered what Lili Rattok sees as a repressed feminist anger.⁷⁷ At the same time, it is possible that due to Elisheva’s foreign origin she was more easily “forgiven” for her female sexual frankness.

About half a dozen novels in Hebrew were published by women during the 1930s. Most went unnoticed and disappeared quickly from the reviews and from later scholarship. One example is Sara Gluzman’s three novels: *Al saf mavet* [On the Verge of Death; 1936], *El hagevul* [To the Border; 1938], and *Homot habarzel* [The Iron Wall; 1941]. All three were serially published in the newspapers, and the last two depicted the stories of Zionists arrested in the Soviet Union during the 1920s. Excerpts of her work have recently appeared in Yaffah Berlovitz’s anthology.⁷⁸ Two other novels received more attention, albeit more scandalous in nature: Batya Kahana’s first

⁷⁶ Alex Zehavi, “Simta’ot,” *Yedioth Ahronoth* 9 Dec. 1977.

⁷⁷ Rattok, *Hakol* 279.

⁷⁸ Berlovitz, *She’ani ‘adama*.

novel *Bifroaḥ etz hehadar* [When the Orange Grove First Blooms; 1931], and Shoshana Shababo's *Maria* (1932). In Kahana's first novel, (the second will be discussed in depth in Chapter 3), Rina, a married mother of one, who awaits her family's promised lot in a *moshav* during the 1920s, is suddenly swept away by a childhood friend. Danya Gross is a successful lawyer, a womanizer and the great admirer of the good life. An anti-Zionist character, he is unable to relate to Rina's and her husband's vision of settling the land and instead offers Rina various temptations including hours spent at cafés, luxury hotels and a trip back to Europe with him. Even though in the end Rina chooses her family and the Zionist ideals her husband represents, this novel is an antithesis to the period's literature. Although Yaffah Berlovitz sees Kahana's writing as a form of escapism in difficult times, Kahana's novels offer more than a pleasurable break.⁷⁹ In both her novels, as will be discussed later, she defies not only social conventions (a married woman having an affair), but also national ones. Her heroines rebel against the national role imposed on women—namely giving birth to sons for the sake of the nation and raising them in its spirit. Although they either repent or are punished, they nevertheless suggest a voice of protest that was not often heard at the time. Interestingly, Kahana's first novel only touched upon these issues while her second work goes much farther with this rebellion.

⁷⁹ Yaffah Berlovitz, "Haḥ ofesh lefantez et haḥ yim," [The Freedom to Fantasize Life], *Maariv* 20 April 1995.

In a similar manner, Shoshana Shababo's *Maria* shocked the small community of the *Yishuv* when it first came out, not only due to its scandalous content, but also because it ignored the national agenda at the time.⁸⁰ The novel followed the forbidden love story between an upper-class Arab-Christian girl and a poor suitor. After the girl, Maria, gives birth to her lover's son he escapes abroad while she becomes a nun. As the lover becomes a famous dancer and wins over her family under a pseudo name, Maria loses her sanity, tries to tempt the Priest at her convent and after kidnapping her son dies at the age of 24. While certainly a melodramatic piece, *Maria* was quickly banned by the literary establishment and particularly by Yehuda Burla who claimed it was the first "cheap" novel to be published in Hebrew.⁸¹ But as Yosef Halevi and Yaffah Berlovitz show, Shababo's writing had a subversive undertone to it which was ignored at the time.⁸² In her works (two novels and several short stories and essays) she constantly fought for the rights of women to choose their destinies—including their own husbands. However, *Maria's* sensational plot and Burla's attack on her kept Shababo out of literary lexicons and historiographies for many years.⁸³

⁸⁰ The reading audience and critics were shocked, writes Yaffah Berlovitz, that "a young writer publishes in 1932 a novel that does not address current affairs— *aliyah*, settlement, defense—and does not develop national portraits...but rather focuses on a foreign woman." Yaffah Berlovitz "Hadyokan hakaful" [The Double Portrait], *Hakivun Mizrah* 11 (2006): 28.

⁸¹ Yossef Halevi, *Bat hamizrah haḥadasha* [The Modern Daughter of the Orient] (Bar Ilan University Press: Ramat Gan, 1996).

⁸² Berlovitz, "Hadyokan hakaful."

⁸³ See Halevi, 15-17.

The next major novel to be published by a woman writer was, again, written by a poet. Leah Goldberg's 1946 novel *Vehu ha'or* [There Comes the Light] is considered one of her most autobiographical works and was recently reissued in Israel with critical acclaim. Goldberg's first work of prose, an epistolary novel titled *Mikhtavim minesi'ah medumah* [Letters from an Imaginary Journey; 1937], was regarded by critics as more of an essay book.⁸⁴ Leah Goldberg, who grew up in Russia and Lithuania, began writing in Hebrew as a young schoolgirl. She received her PhD in Semitic languages from Bonn University, and immigrated to Palestine in 1935, just as her first book of poetry was being published there. Goldberg was a member of the Shlonsky group of modern poets and many of her poems were published in literary journals associated with them. Although Goldberg disliked the category of women-writers, her poetry was often depicted as feminine, private and detached from politics and war.⁸⁵

There Comes the Light, Goldberg's only novel, tells a moving and often somber coming-of-age story of a young woman. In the summer of 1931 20-year-old Nora, returns home for a college vacation. During her stay, Nora falls for a friend of

⁸⁴ This is true both for critics of her time in contemporary scholars.

⁸⁵ When WWII broke out Goldberg had a very famous argument with her fellow poets Avraham Shlonsky and Nathan Alterman on the poet's duties during war. Goldberg claimed that poetry still had to deal with love and nature as a means to contradict the horrors of war, while Alterman and Shlonsky argued that her poetry was too narrow and did not address the universal issues of war—or avoiding it. See Hannan Hever, "Hazemer tam" [The Song Ends: Leah Goldberg's War Poetry], *Pgishot im meshoreret* [Meetings with a Poetess], eds. Ruth Karton-Blum and Anat Weisman (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 2000) 116-135.

her father's but is shattered when she discovers he is infatuated with another more beautiful woman. Yet her fears run deeper than questions of beauty. Throughout the novel, she is haunted by her father's memory, most of all by his insanity which erupted when he was tortured during WWI. Now institutionalized, he comes home to spend time with his daughter. Constantly searching her soul for hints of madness, Nora is thus torn between her fear of a harmful genetic heritage and her love for her father. Between the lines of this seemingly private narrative, we also learn about the world of a young, educated Jewish woman who is often held back because of her origin and class. Thus, as Michael Gluzman notes, "at the height of the cultural effort to establish the image of the sabra while erasing the diasporic past, Goldberg's novel suggest that the past cannot be erased, and the tragic consequences that follow such attempts."⁸⁶

Like its predecessors, Goldberg's novel was not well received when it first appeared. The main critique of the novel was that it represented a private, very European, coming-of-age story in a time of national turmoil. One of the critics even claimed that were the novel not written in Hebrew he could have never guessed where and when it was written.⁸⁷ Yet scholars like Tamar Hess and Michael Gluzman claim that Goldberg's novel was rejected not only because it represented the personal, but also because on a deeper level it threatened Zionist ideology by placing a feminine heroine at the center, and by treating the Zionist option as a distant dream in the years

⁸⁶ Michael Gluzman, "Madua' eineni yekhola lehiot ani bilvad, ani bli hishtaykhut?" [Why Cannot I Just be Me Without Belonging?] *Haaretz (sfarim)* 13 March 2006.

⁸⁷ Emanuel Ben Gurion, "Vehu ha'or" [There Comes the Light], *Davar*, 8 March, 1946: 5.

right before the establishment of the state.⁸⁸ Similar perceptions appeared in the reviews of the novels discussed in this study. Interestingly, many of these so-called private, feminine and delicate works have seemed to question the Zionist-centered patriarchal literary establishment and in the chapters that follow we will trace their story of defiance and rejection.

In this chapter we examined the genre of the novel and its relation to women's writing in Israel within the context of the modern Hebrew and Israeli novel. As we can now see, the novel as a genre presented a liberating yet challenging choice for Israeli women writers. On the one hand the novel provided the breadth and space for experimental writing as suggested in Bakhtin's dialogism or the feminist palimpsest. On the other hand, within the history of modern Hebrew literature, this national male-dominated genre ensured the marginalization of women writers who chose it. The next three chapters will trace the ambivalent position of the female interwar novelists within the literary canon. This is the story of the first novels written by Israeli women and their struggle to gain recognition, while maintaining a sense of self, a struggle not necessarily modeled after the Zionist archetype, and one which has been overlooked for too long.

⁸⁸ Tamar Hess, "Onsham shel ba'alei dimyon" [The Punishment of Dreamers], *Hevra vesifrut* [Literature and Society in Modern Hebrew Culture: Papers in Honor of Gershon Shaked], eds. Judith Bar-el, Yigal Schwartz and Tamar S. Hess (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Keter Publishing, 2000) 274-287.

CHAPTER 2

GENDER AND GENRE

WRITING THE FEMALE BILDUNGSROMAN IN NAOMI FRAENKEL'S TRILOGY *SHAUL AND YOHANNAH*

Shaul veYohannah [Shaul and Yohannah] (1956; 1961; 1967) is a three part historical saga which depicts the lives of German Jews, as well as Christians, during the ascent of the Nazi party in Germany in the early 1930s.¹ Naomi Fraenkel's trilogy opens with a vivid depiction of a poor neighborhood in Berlin, and more specifically one alley, where: "Two rows of rickety houses. Their windows like eyes dark from crying. Their residents are as grey as their walls. The alley's face is always angry [...] a step-daughter to the big city" (1: 6). The quarter, where many factory workers and the recently unemployed reside, is always swarming with political arguments and clashes. At the center of the alley stands Otto's newspaper shop, a place for local meetings and updates as well as an unofficial communist gathering place. The trilogy is named after its two young protagonists who come from the two poles of German Jewish society and, accordingly, from two different sides of the city. Shaul, a boy of eleven at the beginning of the novel grows up on the "Jewish street" in the poor part of town. His parents are the alley's kosher butchers and he is a regular visitor at Otto's store. Yohannah, a ten-year-old Jewish girl, lives on the other side of Berlin. Unlike

¹ Naomi Fraenkel, *Shaul veYohannah* [Shaul and Yohannah] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1956). All translations from the Hebrew hereafter are mine. Page citations are marked in the body of the text.

Shaul, she lives a comfortable life in an assimilated bourgeois Jewish family. But although the trilogy's opening sets an atmosphere for the novel's style and its urban background of a bustling life in an ideologically tense time, it does not necessarily reflect its main story. *Shaul and Yohannah* is molded after the classical German *Bildungsroman*, and as such it follows a coming-of-age story. Surprisingly, it is Yohannah Levi's journey in search of her authentic identity— through an educational (*Bildung*) transformation—that closely relates to and is reflected by the format of the trilogy. Structurally, each of the three volumes of *Shaul and Yohannah* depicts one year in the lives of its characters. Their titles—*Batei 'avot* [The Fathers' Households], *Mot ha'av* [The Death of the Father], and *Banim* [Sons] — seem to imply a patriarchal genealogical saga of a German Jewish family represented by its men. Yet, as noted above, unlike the masculine model that is revealed through these titles, it is a young girl who takes center stage in this family drama, producing an alternative to her decaying family's patriarchy which totally crumbles throughout the three volumes. Thus, although the men mark the stations in this literary journey, they remain immobile. This narrative of female development is powerfully narrated through the image of Yohannah, who defies her paternal heritage. She does that through a double resurrection: of her mother's legacy and of a forgotten Sephardi Levi matriarch who was obliterated from the family's history. Ultimately, it is Yohannah's journey to the past that saves her entire family from the dark future awaiting Jews in Germany. Furthermore, although her story is closely linked with the Zionist movement and its

activities in Western Europe at the time, Fraenkel reclaims this ideology and associates it with the mute genealogy of women in the trilogy.

Although historically Zionism was a masculine movement which put on a pedestal the virile, male body, Fraenkel appropriates it by affiliating it with women as the new representatives of the Jewish future, while the men remain symbols of the past.² In fact, she inverts the language used by the Zionist movement which often depicted the land of Palestine (Zion) as a feminine entity, a bride or a mother, while: "The mysticism of tilling the soil, plowing mother earth to implant seed in her and make her fruitful once more, was exclusively male."³ Significantly, this reversal is deeply connected with Yohannah's coming-of-age story. Thus, she becomes the leading protagonist of this *Bildungsroman*, one that is very different from its male counterparts, whether within the classical genre of the development story or in comparison to the new Jewish man hailed by Hebrew literature. More importantly, in her trilogy Fraenkel creates a new "narrative of identification," because, as Yaffah Berlovitz writes:

[How could women] imagine the establishment of a feminine Israeli subject when they were equipped with a minimal history of founding mothers...and scattered feminine myths...whom while admired for their work and sacrifice, remained in our collective memory exactly because they the answered the needs of the national masculine myth?⁴

² See my detailed discussion of Jewish masculinity in Chapter 4.

³ Leslie Hazelton, *Israeli Women: The Reality Behind the Myths* (New York : Simon and Schuster, 1977) 93.

⁴ Berlovitz, *She'ani adama* 12.

Nevertheless, Zionism plays only a minor role in the trilogy and although it offers the ultimate answer for the protagonists, it is not the only option explored by them. Hence, Fraenkel devotes time and space to Communism and Nazism, and their ideological platforms, in an effort to delineate the myriad options of German identity in the early 1930s.⁵

READING GERMANY IN ISRAEL

Shaul and Yohannah was Naomi Frankel's first work, published when she was a young kibbutz member. Born in 1918 in Berlin to an assimilated Jewish family, Fraenkel immigrated to Jerusalem in 1933 where she trained in Rachel Yanait Ben Zvi's famous educational farm for young female pioneers. Later, she studied Jewish History and Kabala at the Hebrew University. Fraenkel lived on Kibbutz Beit Alpha until 1970, when she began an eight-year service in the Israeli Navy that recruited her, despite her age, to document soldiers' accounts of battles and operations. In 1982, she and her family moved to Kiryat Arba [today they live in Hebron]. Since then she has been ostracized by the Israeli literary establishment that did not support the change in her political views and, accordingly, in her literary direction. Fraenkel published seven

⁵ According to Tal Vald, Fraenkel portrayed numerous German identities in the novel in order to allow her readers the possibility of sympathizing with some of these characters during a time when such empathy towards anything German was completely shunned within Israeli society. See Tal Vald, "Yafyuto shel yefet"[The Beauty of Japheth] thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2001.

novels and one children's book. She was awarded several prizes, including the 1956 Rupin prize and the 1962 Ussishkin Prize for *Shaul and Yohannah*.

When the first volume of *Shaul and Yohannah* appeared, the influential critic Baruch Kurzweil depicted the young writer as one who took a “deep epic breath” before attending: “The serious role of writing a great novel of our times, in which the destiny of a Jewish community, German Jewry, is depicted with the broadest social-epic background.”⁶ Overall, Naomi Fraenkel's opus was well received by both critics and readers. The trilogy became a commercial success and various reviews from this period anticipated the arrival of each sequel. The novels were usually discussed on two levels: one focused on the format and scope of the work, the other addressed its content. Few critics paid attention to the trilogy's heroine Yohannah, and when they did, it was mostly as a catalyst for the Zionist solution: “Because actually, and in a way special for each one, the rest of the Levis reach the same decision. It is just that Yohannah spontaneously preceded what the rest achieved through circumstances and sensibility.”⁷ Kurzweil, as well as other critics, pointed out the influence the modern European novel, especially the works of Thomas Mann, had on Fraenkel's writing. Hence, the importance of the *Bildungsroman*—the German genre of the coming-of-age novel—as a key literary model for this trilogy, will be further explored in this chapter. Like other writers discussed in this dissertation, Fraenkel was often praised

⁶ Baruch Kurzweil, “Shaul and Yohannah,” *Hippus hasifrut hayisra'elit* [the Search of Israeli Literature] (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press, 1982) 279.

⁷ Yehiel Kedmi, “About Shaul and Yohannah,” *Al Hamishmar* (16 February 1962): 19.

for not succumbing to the trends of her time, be it the *Palmach* prose which still dominated the literary scene when the first volume of the trilogy came out (1956), or the state generation in the years that followed. In both cases, critics felt the need to point her out as a “safe” writer who followed familiar models. Thus, Kurzweil describes her work as: "Conventional, loyal to the format of the realist novel," while other critics suggested: "She is not too eager to follow the latest innovations of 'the new novel' and the 'anti-novel' with the 'anti-hero'." ⁸ Most reviewers saw Fraenkel's work as resurrecting the lost world of German Jewry, even leading the reader to: "Find yourself more understanding, more forgiving and even richer by acquiring a new attitude towards German Jewry, an attitude of love and identification with its doubts and fate." ⁹ Others pointed to her retrospected struggle with the question of the Holocaust especially since "the Nazis in the trilogy are few and marginal compared with the many good Germans." ¹⁰ While Fraenkel certainly followed a traditional *Bildung* model, her fresh construction of the female coming-of-age story, as well as her original interpretation of Zionism via feminine and Sephardi identities, were overlooked by previous and contemporary scholars.

Even though the three volumes were greeted by critics as impressive historical novels for their time, they were often belittled as serious literary works failing as “a Jewish family saga about its uprooting from German soil, since it did not reach the

⁸ Iza Perlis, “Shaul veyohannah, hatrilogya shel Naomi Fraenkel” [Shaul and Yohannah, Naomi Fraenkel's Trilogy], *Dvar Hapoelet* 1967: 26.

⁹ Galia Yardeni, “Shaul ve Yohannah,” *Moznaim* (1956): 4.

¹⁰ Perlis. For more on this see Vald, "Yafyuto shel yefet."

scale of a saga and its poetics is too demonstrational and too political-journalistic.”¹¹ The same critics who praised the novels for their historical significance, claimed they lacked profundity: “Too bad she often doesn't know when to shut up...here and there the novel is burdened with sentimentality...there is also a lack of psychological justification...depth and consistency.”¹² In addition, they found that the plots and characters were too numerous and obscured the main protagonists: “Two main things, that are essentially one, are missing: a deeper meaning of the background and of the heroes.”¹³ To the contemporary reader, as well, parts of the trilogy appear to drag on sometimes offering obscure yet heated conversations that seem to grapple with a specific moment in Germany's politics, particularly when Fraenkel attends to questions of workers' rights. These, however, do not manage to overshadow the impact of the feminine coming-of-age story that is revealed throughout the reading.

Indeed, only two reviewers address Yohannah as Frankel's heroine, and both felt she was lacking in perspective: “It's hard to blame the writer for not illustrating clearly enough the experiences of little Yohannah. But in fact, this is the only character, and perhaps even the main character whose soul is revealed to us.”¹⁴ Some of this criticism has resonated in later scholarly works, while other parts were refuted. In 1990 Malka Shaked singled out *Shaul and Yohannah* as one of the major

¹¹ Gavriel Moked, “Shaul ve Yohannah,” *Davar* 5 January 1962.

¹² Kurzweil, “Shaul and Yohannah,” 283.

¹³ Yardeni, “Shaul ve Yohannah”. This type of criticism, regarding the lack of a coherent, linear plot, seems to resonate in women's writing regardless of their style or particular sub-genre within novel writing; see further discussion in Chapter 3.

¹⁴ Moked.

genealogical novels of Hebrew literature, the “first literary attempt to understand the roots and lessons of the holocaust.”¹⁵ Shaked praises Fraenkel’s scope and depth in the trilogy and focuses on the different writing techniques employed by the author in creating a family history that evolves from the 16th century on. Consequently, the broad spectrum of this novel “derives from the awareness of an entire world, with its different layers, that had been erased.”¹⁶ By placing an assimilated Jewish family at the center of the novel, Shaked argues, Fraenkel in fact declared that her main question in the trilogy is one of identity. As such, she concludes, the story of Yohannah must be read as a national narrative ultimately leading to the Zionist solution.

Shaked’s reading ignores, however, questions of gender roles within the family and their relation to the national turmoil in Germany, and misses out on an entire level of interpretation. Some of these issues were briefly addressed later by Pnina Shirav in a 1994 essay in which she depicted *Shaul and Yohannah* as a search for the “Law of the Mother,” to paraphrase Lacan, as a means to “expropriate the Zionist entity from its exclusive masculine character, and open up a space for the story of the Jewish

¹⁵ Malka Shaked, *Huliot veshalsholet* [Links and a Chain] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1990) 238-250.

¹⁶ Shaked, *Huliot veshalsholet* 238. This approach was also prevalent in the reviews of Dvora Baron’s work who was taken to be the token writer of the small Jewish town. For more see Nurit Govrin, *Dvora Baron: hamaḥatzit harishona* [The First Half: The Life and Work of Dvora Baron 1887-1922] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1988); and Lili Rattok, *Hakol* 280-282.

Israeli 'daughter'.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Shirav does not address the poetic masculine model of the *Bildungsroman* adopted by Fraenkel, and does not account for its relevance in reading the trilogy. This choice of genre will prove critical as Fraenkel adopts a historical façade, fueled by the importance of the issues at hand and the ultimate Zionist ending they lead to, in order to delineate, almost uninterrupted, the story of a young girl's coming-of-age and her interpretation of Zionism as deeply rooted in Judaism.

THE BILDUNGSROMAN

The *Bildungsroman*, often defined as the novel of development or of education, originated in Germany in the latter half of the 18th century, and has since become one of the major narrative genres in Western literature. The classical model (a prominent example would be Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*) follows the story of an individual, a young man, and his journey (real or metaphorical) away from home in his quest for self-identity, one that is necessarily different from his upbringing. Usually this pursuit ends by achieving maturity and harmony as the protagonist returns to society and takes his place within it. The German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey famously summarized the *Bildung* tradition as the story in which: "A young male hero discovers himself and his social role through the experience of love, friendship and the

¹⁷ Pnina Shirav, "Derekh ha'em" [The Road of the Mother/Through the Mother] *Alai Siah* 34 (1994): 69-82.

hard realities of life.”¹⁸ Interestingly, as we shall see, Fraenkel evokes Goethe's writing also on the thematic level of the novel: the Goethe Society in which some of the characters are members desperately seeks to commemorate his oeuvre, ironically marking him as the last representative of Germany's soon to be trampled past.

In his renowned work on the *Bildungsroman*, *The Way of the World*, Franco Moretti claims that this genre not only aimed to capture modernity, but also struggled with its very essence. The *Bildungsroman* appeared in Europe at the same time as it was searching for a cultural model to represent a new status of modernity and therefore Moretti considers The *Bildungsroman*: “The symbolic form of modernity.”¹⁹ He then categorizes the *Bildungsroman* not by style but by plot, claiming that there are two guiding categories for its textual organization: the classification and the transformation principles. While both usually exist in each novel, a preference of one system over the other signifies certain values and attitudes especially towards modernity. According to the classification principle the plot shifts from one point to another and there is only one clear and possible ending, thus the narrative is merely a tool to reach this target. The transformation principle, on the contrary, focuses on the story being told, suggesting that: “What makes a story meaningful is its narrativity, its being an open-ended process.”²⁰ As we shall see next, Fraenkel employs both

¹⁸ Quoted in Esther K. Labovitz, "The Female 'Bildungsroman' in the Twentieth Century, a Comparative Study," diss., New York University, 1982, 6.

¹⁹ Franco Moretti, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* (New York: Verso, 1987).

²⁰ Moretti 7.

principles but while her heroine is destined to achieve the Zionist dream, the various plots and characters that occupy the novels often serve to blur the boundaries of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, thus constructing a genre and a resistance to it within the same reading experience. Regardless of the format, the *Bildungsroman* novel, Moretti writes: “Has accustomed us to looking at normality *from within* rather than from the stance of its exceptions; and it has produced a phenomenology that makes normality interesting and meaningful as normality.”²¹ Notably, it is the anti-hero, in our case a young girl, who is at the focus of the text here in what will open a space for other feminine heroines in future interpretations of the genre within Hebrew literature.²²

In recent years, scholars have turned to reread the *Bildung* genre through the lenses of gender and nation. Traditionally these novels were limited to male protagonists (typically white and heterosexual), focusing on movement and change and portraying an image of the new man who will build a new nation. Thus, women were necessarily excluded as the ones confined to the home. As we have seen in Chapter 1, there is a strong link between the *Bildungsroman* and the national endeavor. In fact, the *Bildungsroman* was advocated as representing German

²¹ Moretti 11.

²² With few precursors like Dvora Baron and Leah Goldberg, Naomi Fraenkel’s trilogy is certainly one of the broadest and most ambitious works to feature a feminine coming-of-age story within the history of modern Hebrew literature. While several short stories that dealt with such questions (most famously, by Amalia Kahana Carmon and Ruth Almog) were published before, and mostly after *Shaul and Yohannah*, few such novels, aside from those discussed in this dissertation, were published until the 1980s. Thus, Fraenkel anticipated this theme in the works of Kahana-Carmon, Almog, Yehudit Katzir, and Ronit Matalon to name a few. See also Feldman *No Room* and Naveh “Leqet Pe’ah.”

nationality when it first emerged, especially as a literary contrast to French and English literature.²³ While the male development journey was delineated as spiral, beginning at one place and moving upward towards a different, higher point, “the pattern for the female novel of development has been largely circular, rather than spiral: “women in fiction remain at home...they are initiated at home through learning the rituals of human relationships, so that they may replicate the lives of their mothers.”²⁴ Similarly, the affiliation between the *Bildungsroman* and the nation exists mostly in the public sphere: “As the person grows and forms him/herself, so does the nation, feeling similar growing pains and struggles with rites of passage as the individual.”²⁵ By rereading the genre through the concepts of gender and nation scholars have been able to include formerly mute or absent voices from the national story, thus expanding the genre.

Such readings are of course extremely relevant to the story of modern Hebrew literature in general and to Naomi Fraenkel’s *Shaul and Yohannah* in particular. While (male) writers of Hebrew literature have often experimented with the *Bildungsroman* model, as well as autobiography, women writers were less likely to create a close affiliation between the national and the personal story even when they saw themselves

²³ Kontje, *Private Lives in the Public Sphere* 1-19.

²⁴ Mary Anne Ferguson “The Female Novel of Development and the Myth of Psyche,” *The Voyage In: Fictions of Female Development*, eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1983) 228.

²⁵ Julia A. Kushigian, *Reconstructing Childhood: Strategies of Reading for Culture and Gender in the Spanish American Bildungsroman* (Lewisburg, Buckwell University Press, 2003) 17.

as active members of the national community.²⁶ Towards the end of the 1930s the genre of the Saga in Hebrew literature [roman toladeti] emerged, as Malka Shaked shows, in an effort to capture the enormous historical change in the life of the 20th century Jewish family, and particularly in dealing with the Holocaust. Combining historical and genealogical narratives, “the writer of the saga plants the personal reality of the characters into the family frame, whose laws of existence...influence the character and characterization of the protagonists no less than history.”²⁷ Thus, many of these novels like Avraham Kabak’s *Toldot mishpaḥa ‘aḥat* [History of One Family; 1943-1945], Haim Hazaz’s *Hayoshevet baganim* [Thou That Dwellst in the Gardens; 1965] and even Agnon’s *Korot bateinu* [The Beams/ History of our Houses/ Homes; 1979] project a sense of catastrophe while at the same time, offering a positive future, most often in the image of the Zionist solution.²⁸ In this sense it will be interesting to examine here how Fraenkel, who created an unparalleled opus at the time, set out to encompass the complex social and political position of German Jews in the 1930s, through the eyes of a young girl. Throughout this chapter we will see how Fraenkel both employs and manipulates the *Bildung* model to accommodate her feisty heroine in her religious-national narrative of development.

²⁶ See also discussions in Feldman *No Room* and Berlovitz *She'ani adama*.

²⁷ Shaked, *Huliot* 18.

²⁸ For similar examples see Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1984).

Gender and Family, the Patriarchal Home: First Volume

As noted earlier, the first novel of the trilogy, titled *The Fathers' Household*, provides the social and familial environment of the two main characters, illustrating both their cultural roots and their struggle against these foundations. This overview fits very well with the classical *Bildungsroman* model where: “At a specified point the hero rebels against the father and all the values he represents—social, religious, political, economic, philosophical and cultural.”²⁹ Yet Fraenkel’s presentation here is more complex than simply providing an explanatory background. In depicting the different characters’ households (and this is true for both central and marginal characters), often delving into their family histories, she portrays the world and heritage of German Jews; but she also provides her heroes with the different gender role models played out by their family members both past and present. The trilogy, and particularly the first volume, is constructed around double gender-role models for both men and women, while a third option lies beyond them. Although for the men this option remains unattainable, for the women and specifically for Yohannah, this third route offers a way out of the patriarchal captivity. Fraenkel demonstrates these preferences mostly through the members of the Levi family but other, subsidiary characters often reflect and replicate gender-related behaviors as well. These, as we shall see throughout the entire opus, correspond with national, political, and social identities, and serve in designating the path of Fraenkel’s protagonist throughout the trilogy.

²⁹ Kushigian 28.

The first volume opens with Shaul's uncle's visit. Phillip Lasker is a respected attorney in the Jewish community, and a close friend of the Levi family, moving between the two worlds they occupy. In this meeting he asks Shaul to escort him to the Levi estate on the other side of town, a far cry from the crowded room that Shaul shares with his grandfather. Politically motivated, Shaul Goldschmidt attends the *tnua*, the Zionist youth movement, where he and his friends prepare themselves for future immigration to Palestine (although until the very last chapters of the trilogy none of the characters really does leave Germany). The younger kids, like Shaul, recruit others, celebrate the Jewish holidays and stage heroic Jewish plays such as the story of *Yehudah hamacabi*. Shaul sees himself as a future leader of this movement: "Shaul sails into a wonderful world, into the great desert...Shaul is the great deputy of the great leader. [Together] they will go out to conquer the holy land" (1: 240).³⁰ Although later in the trilogy he contemplates leaving the Zionists for the Communists, a dilemma facing many youngsters at the time, he remains a leading figure in the *tnua* and often berates Yohannah whom he recruits, for not behaving like a true future pioneer.

Far from Shaul's political and financial concerns, Yohannah Levi lives in an old Junker mansion with her six brothers and sisters, her father, and the family's long-

³⁰ He is also obviously named after King Saul an admired yet tragic character who began his way as God's chosen king and ended it as his unwanted son.

time servants.³¹ The Levi family, whose story and ancestry dominate the trilogy, are assimilated bourgeois Jews who live in comfortable seclusion. Yohannah's mother died when she was young, yet she is the only one who looks like her while the other children are all fair-skinned with blond hair. Yohannah, in contrast, "a wild, untamed girl [is] not pretty and untidy. There is always a sock hanging loose, a dress unraveled, buttons falling down, her hair is never combed and [she] stands out like a stranger in the company of her brothers and sisters all fair and beautiful with a neat appearance" (1: 26). Although Yohannah inherited her mother's dark looks, she does not possess her grace; more importantly, as her father notes: "Her mother was also dark but noble, good-looking and this one a little Jewess..." (1: 26). Yohannah's Jewishness however is still an unknown domain for her at the beginning of the trilogy. Most notably, she is an avid reader who seems to live in and through her books. Thus when Shaul first meets her, sitting and reading inside a barrel in the garden, the younger brother Bomba introduces her as follows:

This is my sister Yohannah, don't go near her. She'll immediately yell at you 'don't block the sun!' She read a story about some wise man who did just that [sit in a barrel], and since then she has been sitting in this barrel. It's a kind of disease, reading; she goes to the bathroom with a book in hand and goes out when she finishes it without washing herself (1: 16).³²

³¹ The Junkers were part of the old feudal German nobility and were closely affiliated with the monarchist forces as well as the Prussian Army up until the early 1920s in Germany.

³² For more on this type of mimetic reading, especially in relation to gender, see Lubin, *Isah koret* 97-100, 150-155.

In other places in the trilogy Yohannah demonstrates the same involved reading when she refuses, for example, to change her nightgown so she can experience what Isabella the Queen of Spain did: "When her husband went to war, she wore the same nightgown for three years, to prove her loyalty to him. I want to know how Isabella felt wearing the loyalty-gown" (1: 117). Throughout the novel Yohannah is captured by tales of the past but eventually becomes a writer of the future as she asserts a new feminine model within her family.

ANGEL OR WARRIOR? FEMININE ROLE-MODELS IN THE TRILOGY

While Yohannah evolves as Fraenkel's heroine, the first volume also provides several female role models, who vacillate between apathy and ideology. The most prominent of them is Edith, Yohannah's older sister. When we first meet her she is a young woman of 24, yet still childishly naive. The family treats Edith as a grown child, one who will remain in the house indefinitely. While Heinz, the older brother, is out on business meetings and late night parties at bars and restaurants, Edith never leaves the house yet finding it almost hard to breath in it:

Something isn't right with me. Such fatigue that I can't overcome. Heinz would say 'degenerative fatigue'...I simply don't know how to fight. The slightest wind is stronger than I am. Mother surely wasn't like that. What was she like? Father never speaks of her (1: 27).³³

³³ This type of *ennui*—the French term for a (mostly feminine) state of weakness and boredom—was also apparent in the men, and women, portrayed by the *Tehiyah* writers and serves to emphasize Edith's feminine traits; see also Naveh, "Leket Pe'ah" 87.

Although Edith shares Yohannah's interest in the absent mother, she is unable to reconnect to her image as Yohannah will, not only because she lacks her sister's imagination, but also because she is a living signifier of patriarchy: and is in fact depicted mostly through the men's eyes. For Phillip Lasker, who is infatuated with her, she is the ultimate emblem of the Christian Madonna, an icon of virginity and motherhood: "Her hair is light and long, braided on her nape...her skin fair and transparent to the point where the blue veins are visible underneath her temples." (1: 21). For her father she is a feminine, delicate flower who exists as a mere ornament in their home, mostly to entertain his guests at the absence of a lady of the house: "Only Edith felt sorry for her father and accepted the role of a housewife. Every day she shows up in the dining room to receive her father's guests" (1: 19). As feminist scholars have shown, women are often trapped in the male gaze, serving as its objects rather than its possessors. Furthermore, the woman who dares to look back offers a frightening stare, which "threatens to immobilize him [man], to deprive him of self-command."³⁴ To avoid this danger Edith is constantly praised for her looks and is often encouraged by her father and Frieda the housekeeper to rest and stay in—so that her desires are supervised and domesticated. In her seminal essay on the cinematographic gaze Laura Mulvey argues that: "The paradox of phallogentrism in all its manifestation is that it depends on the image of the castrated woman to give

³⁴ Beth Newman, "'The Situation of the Looker-On': Gender, Narration and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights*," *PMLA* 5 (October 1990): 1030.

order and meaning to its world.”³⁵ Edith is therefore treated as a “bearer of meaning” and as such she remains forever captured in the private sphere of the home. In fact, she is a replica of her paternal grandmother, a pious woman who remained secluded in her house, as well as of Hermina, another aunt who will be discussed in detail in the next section. Indeed, it is no coincidence that both Phillip and Mr. Levi, who share the same persona of the philosophical, tormented assimilated-Jewish male, choose to suffocate their counterparts through the image of the angelic woman. Edith herself notices the resemblance between the two men and says about Phillip, her father’s natural choice of a husband: "I can't find common grounds with him, just like with my dear father. He too is a man with principles. The ground of his life—the same grey reality that he repeats and chews all the time—he could never understand us [the Levi children]" (1: 24).

By contrast, Edith is introduced to her brother’s new friend Emil Ripke, a police officer, and to her family’s dismay becomes quickly taken with him. Emil’s crude exterior and manners are often depicted in the novel in contrast to Edith’s gentle beauty: “And so he stands and constantly looks at her. His face is of a merchant checking the goods, his hands are like the butcher’s, red and coarse” (1: 28). Again Edith is captured within the male gaze, yet this time she embraces it as way for this

³⁵ Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Feminism and Film Theory* ed. Constance Pendley (Routledge: New York, 1988) 57-69.

“angel in the house” to break free.³⁶ Unlike Yohannah who carves her own path outside, Edith elects to defy her father by choosing not only his ultimate opposite as her suitor but also a man who projects a different kind of manhood, as we shall see later on. Emil, who is captivated by her angelic demeanor, is nevertheless humiliated by their class difference and seeks to trample Edith, and her family’s pride by making her his own. To demonstrate his complete control over Edith, he sets up their meetings in a lowly inn, situated in the city’s forests. "The room Emil rented is dusty and dull; a large wooden bed stands at its center covered with rough cloth; on a stumbling dresser a china washing bowl and a tattered kettle. Everything is run down, old and diseased" (1: 393). Their relationship takes a startling turn as we learn, in the very opening of the second book, of Emil’s Nazi affiliation and a new dimension is added to their destructive liaison.

In a parallel plot, Fraenkel depicts the turbulent love story of another couple: Phillip Lasker and Bella Cohen, his secretary and an avid member of the Zionist movement. While early in the novel we encounter Phillip’s obsession with Edith, he also understands that: “He awaits tomorrow only to meet Edith again and realize once

³⁶ This image relies on the popular Victorian impression of the perfect woman that derived from a poem by Coventry Patmore in which he depicts his ideal wife as devoted and submissive. The poem was later famously mocked by Virginia Woolf, in "Professions for Women," *Collected Essays Vol. 2* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), 284-289. For more on this imagery see Gilbert and Gubar 16-27.

more that their lives will never merge” (1: 22). Disappointed, Phillip pursues an affair with Bella who is portrayed as Edith’s complete opposite. A far cry from the golden Madonna: “Bella is a 20-year old woman. Her dark hair cut short like a guy. She is a member of the Zionist youth movement. A good-looking girl with contemplative dark eyes. Very thin, she is dressed according to the youth movement dress code: a blue skirt, white shirt” (1: 34). Bella and Phillip often discuss their dream of leaving Germany to start a new life in Palestine. Yet even within these plans Phillip projects on Bella his fantasies of Edith:

In the land of Israel we will grow a generation like this summer day, with fair skin and fair eyes, filled with tenderness and serenity. There are Jews like that. Have you ever looked at the faces of the Madonna? We will grow Jewish girls that would look like the Madonna. We will wipe off their faces any heavy, tear-filled Jewish features (1: 39).³⁷

While Bella is in love with Phillip, her loyalty is first and foremost to the Zionist movement and she senses that Phillip would never leave Germany as he encourages others to do. Like Edith, Bella also represents a female archetype in the novel, one that is again reflected in the novel in different women of different ideologies.³⁸ For Bella, as for some of the other characters, ideology precedes the

³⁷ Interestingly, Fraenkel provides an ideal Christian female model that parallels the familiar adoption of the “Aryan” man by the Zionist movement; see also discussion in Chapter 4.

³⁸ I will mention here just two of the more prominent characters: Gerda, an avid communist who married Heinz’s best friend and broke his heart and the mother of Heini, (a factory worker who symbolizes ideal manhood in the novel), a social-democrat who speaks for the old regime of the republic and convinces her son to

personal and thus Bella's commitment to the Zionist movement overrides her needs or desires. In fact, she represents in the trilogy the ultimate image of the *halutza* (female pioneer) who devotes her life to the cause of establishing the Jewish state. Here, Fraenkel manifests the gender/ideology inversion we mentioned in the beginning as the entire image of the *halutz* was (at least in ideal) masculine in nature and hailed the male body as its signifier.³⁹ Thus, Bella becomes the ultimate Zionist representative in this novel, at least of social Zionism, as Yohannah will offer a different path. Soon thereafter, Bella discovers she is pregnant and to her dismay Phillip is hesitant. She chooses to bury her fantasies of a future with Phillip and turns to have an abortion through her connection with an older Jewish doctor she has met in one of the Zionist movement's assemblies. Dr. Blum, another assimilated Jew, whose Christian wife has left him with their son after he decided to return to his roots, serves as a father figure and a place of refuge to Bella. After the abortion she declares she will return to the Youth House she is running, but every day she collapses and stays put at the doctor's house while trying to convince him to immigrate to Palestine with her. When she does return to the commune, in the second volume, she no longer feels elated by her ideological mission and at the same time she becomes all the more devoted to it.

Edith and Bella, then, provide two opposite forms of femininity, a tame and passive one versus an active assertive one. Fraenkel's trilogy, however, also links

become politically active. Both women live for their political agendas. One sacrifices her marriage, the other her son.

³⁹ See Gluzman, *Haguf hatzioni* 11-33.

these gender traits to the national ones. Thus, both women provide extreme ideological poles as well—a radical assimilation to a point of engaging in a romantic relationship with the enemy, and sacrificing personal happiness in the name of ideology. Both remain unhappy with their choices. Although these seem to be the options presented to Yohannah as she grows up, Fraenkel’s young heroine fights these and other feminine “ghosts”, as we shall see next, in order to embrace a third option through the legacy of her foremothers.

JEWISH MANHOOD: A DEAD-END

The Levi patriarchy is drawn in the trilogy as situated between two poles. On one end we find the grandfather: Yacov Levi is a vital, animated and well-respected man, he was known as a trouble maker in his youth but then settled down and married a quiet, religious Jewish wife. Nevertheless, his character represents a flamboyant, self-assured masculinity that is lacking in the rest of the Levi men. The embodiment of good life, he is fond of food, drink, and pretty women and encourages his grandchildren to run around and fully explore life. Although his late wife kept a religious household, his family, like many assimilated bourgeois Jews at the time, adopted a “liberal-humanist” view of religion. Thus, in the course of the first novel we find the Levi family celebrating Christmas and attending church on Sundays.

A different version of Jewish manhood that is also represented by Phillip Lasker is apparent in Arthur Levi, Yohannah’s father, who is often addressed as Mr.

Levi in the trilogy. The father is a subdued man, a lover of books and philosophy whose world has collapsed with the sudden death of his wife, a Polish Jew he married during his military service: "She was a small woman and very gentle, dark and good looking; she made the impression of being of good upbringing, courteous and pleasant. Her eyes were an exception, they were dark and passionate and betrayed her well-mannered image" (1: 48).⁴⁰ After her unexpected death from a rare illness, both the grandfather and the father grieve for her, each in his own way. Arthur disappears for a year, leaving his children with his father. Yacov Levi, on the other hand, asks to bury the mother in the house he himself bought her when she first married his son: "Here, he said to her, you can live as you like and rest from the civilized life my son imposes on you" (1: 48). This passionate woman fulfilled for the grandfather what he failed to achieve in his own marriage by producing what he deemed as appropriate heirs to his name. His son, however, remains reclusive and is hardly involved in his family's life. Nicknamed "the prince" by his children, he is portrayed as the most oblivious character, not just to the political change in Germany but even to what goes on in his own house. His son Heinz is afraid to share with him the grim news

⁴⁰ This is one of the many references to the difference between "fair" (Western) and "dark" (Eastern) Jews in Germany, a recurring motif throughout the entire trilogy. Accordingly, German Jews are considered more cultured and refined than their *Ostjuden* relatives. However, by dividing the different characters into East and West, dark and light Fraenkel also marks an opposition between the "original" Jews and those assimilated within the Germanic nations. Nevertheless, there is a somewhat ironic subtext here as we know this differentiation was completely negated by the Nazis.

regarding the family's steel factory in these new days of political upheaval in Germany, and is generally disgusted by his father: "His princely appearance annoys me every time. Even on this unpleasant morning, when every other man, free of work, would cuddle in bed, he is standing here all polished and tidy as though he is ready to receive guests at any moment" (1: 77).

Thus, Yohannah's grandfather and father provide the two contradictory masculine models of the family. The younger generation, namely Heinz, is drawn to neither pole. Thus a third, alternative, male model that is not within reach for these Jewish men, is also delineated in the novel, usually in the image of the Other, the German. These virile, earthy men are represented in the novel in the images of a steel worker and a Nazi officer. Ultimately this model, in its male version, does not materialize for the men of this Jewish family, its failure signifying the beginning of the end for their patriarchal dynasty.

Heinz, the oldest of the Levy family is considered the official heir and the new manager of the steel factory. Unlike his liberal father and aristocratic grandfather, he is deeply worried about the family's financial future in Germany, and operates in different ways in order to assure their stability. But Heinz is not only struggling with the legacy of his father, he also struggles with his own identity especially in gender terms. As the manager-in-chief of the factory, Heinz sits in an upper office detached from the workers yet he is particularly obsessed with one of them, "Fire Heini," depicted in the novel as "a sooty fire-stoker...his back and arms are naked and their

muscles dance like flexible steel cords” (1: 81). Heini represents everything that Heinz isn’t: a virile man who makes his living with his body and enjoys the earthy pleasures of life. Heinz’s eroticized gaze follows Heini devouring his lunch every day, while the “crunching of his jaws, the licking of his tongue that he felt through his window pulled him with hidden ropes” (1: 92). This stare at the Other’s image fully clarifies not only what Heinz himself is missing but the intricate relationship between the Jewish self and the German Other. Ultimately, Heini, the alternative male role model to the father and grandfather, is also, ironically, the mending of the masculine image hailed by the Zionist movement at the time.⁴¹ To Heinz, both of them represent Germany’s lost generation: “Nothing Heini, he [Heinz] would mumble, nothing, I’m like you. We’re both at the same age, with the same name and the sons of nothing...Heinz talked to Heini, casting metal in the yard, as though he was talking to himself” (1: 93). Notably, Fraenkel goes to great lengths in the novel to portray the failure of the Jewish man on both the sexual and national levels; she does so as a means to highlight her heroine’s successful journey throughout the trilogy.⁴²

⁴¹ For example, “muscle Jews,” a term first brought up by Dr. Max Nordau, one of the founders of the Zionist movement in Western Europe, in his speech in the Second Zionist Congress on August 28, 1898. Nordau, Theodore Herzl, and many writers and intellectuals later developed this image of the “New Jew” who with his masculine body will redeem the “virgin” Land of Zion. I will not go into these images here as the figure of the Zionist man is practically absent from Fraenkel’s trilogy. Issues of masculinity and male gender roles will be further explored in Chapter 4.

⁴² A similar move, whereby the heroine’s triumphs are emphasized by a male character’s failures, is made by Rachel Eytan as we will see in the next chapter.

The Butterfly Awakens: Second Volume

The second volume in Fraenkel's trilogy is aptly titled *The Death of the Father* and as such it opens up a new path for its heroine. Following the *Bildungsroman*, the second phase of the hero's journey "is an exploration of how the hero—and perhaps the reader—might learn to think independently, gradually rendering the fictional mentors obsolete."⁴³ Indeed, Yohannah's education takes center stage in this book. The novel opens with a different death, though, the death of the "Raven Princess," the Levis' long time neighbor and the object of childhood fantasies for Yohannah.⁴⁴ For years Yohannah and her younger brother used to watch the aging princess feeding the ravens on the street and then disappearing, silently, into her lonely mansion. This act of kindness strikes a chord with the girl: "Little Yohannah dreams of a great deed that she will do one of these days for the countess: then she'll become a devoted and good mother to her [Yohannah], as she is with the ravens" (1: 137). Pnina Shirav argues that throughout the novel Yohannah "searches for replacements for her dead mother, she exchanges one character for another in a slow process of approximation that slowly leads her backwards, to the real and double-faced signified of the dark signifier that

⁴³ Russel A. Berman, "Modernism and the Bildungsroman: Thomas Mann's Magic Mountain," *The Cambridge Companion to The Modern German Novel*, ed. Graham Bartram (New York : Cambridge University Press, 2004) 77-93.

⁴⁴ The appearance of the raven here and in several other places in the trilogy—where it usually represents Germany's former nobility— alludes to some well known German folk tales including ones written by the Grimm brothers. The most common tale usually revolves around children who were turned into ravens after their parents wished for it at a time of despair. The spell is broken only by another person who hears about their story. Fraenkel's ravens are dark aristocrats who have lost their title in pre-WWII Germany and whose pagan heritage was resurrected in the Nazi party's propaganda.

differentiates her from the rest of the family: the mother's legacy and authentic Jewishness.”⁴⁵ The death of the princess also marks the end of childhood and the beginning of a new political reality in Germany, as the old woman bequeaths her house to the Nazi party. Thus, separating from this dark, imaginary mother figure means putting German culture behind, as Yohannah turns to explore new possibilities. But the second volume also signifies the beginning of the move from a fantasized dark womanhood to Yohannah's major quest in *Shaul and Yohannah*: learning more about her mother and her background as a means of establishing her own identity. To do that, she will need to shake off the other feminine role models provided within the Levi clan in order to uncover what her father has been so reluctant to discuss. Hence, the journey in the second novel is an excursion from the false dark forces of Germany's pagan legends (through Yohannah's first love, a dark mysterious count) to the dark Jewishness of her female ancestors.

No longer a naive little girl, Yohannah self-importantly promotes the values of the *tnua* wherever she goes, and painfully torments herself when these contradict her dreams and desires. To hold herself accountable, she begins writing a diary: “The only ear that listened to all the secrets of her heart, the only refuge for all of her experiences since she joined the *tnua*” (2: 58). Although Yohannah writes this journal mostly as a reminder of her many sins, it is also a change for her as she moves from being a passive reader of past tales to a prolific writer of her own present. Furthermore, this

⁴⁵ Shirav, "Derekh ha' em" 2.

type of writing frees her from obeying any rules: "Because its [the diary] mode is one of linear temporal succession, it does not seem to impose distorting structures on the natural order of experience. It has no end: Consequently it is never 'finished,' either as a text or as a work of art."⁴⁶ Ironically, while Fraenkel herself obeys a rigid literary genre, she allows her heroine to "roam freely" in her writing. Through her writing, and unlike Shaul, Yohannah also questions the rules and regulations of the Zionist movement: from helping others in need to sharing one's every thought with the other members. More importantly, she seeks a place for self expression within the *tnua*, but often seems to find it in Judaism. "She went with the girls from her group to the synagogue on Saturday to recruit new girls, and instead of standing at the gates and starting up a conversation with them, she was drawn in and listened to the songs which she found beautiful. She could not hide her excitement from the rest of the girls" (2: 64). Her attraction to the "old world" marks her as different and perhaps even threatening to the rigid values of the *tnua*. Thus, Yohannah, as she proves throughout the trilogy, is an independent thinker who regularly struggles with the rules bestowed on her by her family and her newly adopted ideology.

While she rediscovers her Jewishness which will further connect her to her mother, Yohannah is also exposed to other feminine models prevalent in her family, ones which are introduced to her through the men. When she accompanies her father

⁴⁶ Lorena Martens, *The Diary Novel* (Cambridge University Press, 1985) 187. For more on the poetics of a diary novel see the discussion of Batya Kahana's novel in the next chapter.

to visit his brother Alfred, a philologist who lives by himself in another city, she hears a great deal about her aunt Hermina: “Who sat alone by the window, adorned in her jewelry, and looked on to the street and the people, year after year, an entire life, until she abandoned the window and died” (2: 244). This image provides an array of feminine stereotypes: the woman sitting at the window "gives the impression of a person hemmed in, even locked in" and is only able to watch the world outside without taking part of it.⁴⁷ In Hermina's case she does so while decorating herself for the gaze coming in from the street. It is of course a male, patriarchal gaze that dominates the public sphere outside, the one which refuses to let her participate in it. Therefore, when Uncle Alfred offers Yohannah the aunt's antique jewelry she is reluctant to accept, fearing that she will also inherit the fate of their bearer: “The doors of the locked house will never open for her. She will never be free. Like the uncle, she too will sink into the heavy books, and like aunt Hermina she will shine in her jewelry” (2: 246-7). Yohannah even imagines the aunt's ghost warning her that she is doomed to be locked forever like the other women in the Levi family (Yohannah's grandmother, for example). Yohannah, however, rebels: “Neither aunt Hermina's jewels nor your books will confine me to grandmother's screeching armchair. Not me, Uncle Alfred!” (2: 250). Not only does Yohannah reject these images of the past; she also manages to break free from present confinements and succeeds where Edith fails

⁴⁷ Nehama Aschkenasi, *Woman at the Window: Biblical Tales of Oppression and Escape* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998) 14.

miserably. Yet she does so only after experiencing her sexual coming-of-age in a new relationship that emerges, unsurprisingly, after the death of the Raven Princess.

PYGMALION'S CURSE: ERASING IDENTITY

Beyond the metaphorical change symbolized in the Princess's death, a very real turn of event takes place in Yohannah's life. When the Princess is on her deathbed her old maid sends Yohannah to fetch Count Autokar, her nephew to whom she has not spoken in years. The count, a gifted sculptor in his thirties, lives in seclusion ever since his cousin, the son of the princess, died in WWI after Autokar had convinced him to join the army. Autokar denounces his aristocratic background and leaves his (Nazi) father's wealth and title behind, to live the life of an artist. He resides in an attic placed in one of the working class neighborhoods and continuously works on the sculpture of Triglav, a mythical three headed god from Germany's pre-Christian past that, according to legend, is blind to the sins of human beings. Autokar's seclusion is also an emotional-sexual one as he substitute women for marble: "A woman's touch has never managed to arouse in him the slight, trembling feel of the stone, the matter and the marble." (2: 179). When he meets Yohannah he immediately befriends the strange girl and, surprisingly, she becomes a form of muse for him, almost an erotic obsession. After first seeing her he suddenly feels the urge to create:

Could it be that this greenish, slim girl, of all people, this girl who has nothing but large eyes that touch the heart...she will be able to stimulate his fingers? Nonsense. And still he has a desire to take this frail body and to carve it...carve it into what? (2: 179).

Autokar manifests here another element of patriarchy of looking at the young woman as a blank page. As Gilbert and Gubar argue: "It is just because women are defined as wholly passive, completely void of generative power...that they become numinous to male artists."⁴⁸ When their friendship evolves, Yohannah experiences a major rift in her life. She is torn between her commitment to the Zionist movement (and Shaul) and her newly found Jewish identity, and her stormy feelings toward the Christian count who is all but indifferent to the political changes around them. Even the fact that the princess' house becomes the headquarters of the Nazi youth movement does not bother him. Interestingly, through Yohannah, the count is finally able to leave his unfinished work behind in order to devote himself to a new project—creating a statue of Goethe, commissioned by the Goethe Society to which Yohannah's father belongs. Goethe, of course, represents Germany's intellectual heritage, a writer who devoted his works the representation of humanity versus evil; yet as Heinz notes: "For Goethe man is cause for envy and guilt and cannot therefore produce relief for the burden that each of us carries these days" (2: 216). Thus, Fraenkel evokes Goethe's personality and writing on two levels.⁴⁹ In her poetics she clearly references the German *Bildungsroman*, of which Goethe was a major contributor if not the very founder; thematically, Goethe also represents what will soon become Germany's erased past. Although Autokar is commissioned to finish his statue, towards the end of

⁴⁸ Gilbert and Gubar 21.

⁴⁹ Goethe's first name, Johann, also resonates in Yohannah's although she manages to escape the fate of his statue in the novel.

the trilogy, after Hitler wins the elections, he freezes and feels that just as his previous statue, his Goethe too will remain faceless as he does not wish for “the face of the future to be grounded in pain...because all hope is gone” (3: 578).

Completely infatuated with the mysterious count who seemed to have appeared out of the figments of her imagination, Yohannah recognizes he is also one of the few adults in the novel to treat her as a grown woman. Toward the end of the second novel Autokar and Yohannah’s relationship intensifies; according to Baruch Kurzweil: “Here and there the novel reaches, on this topic, the limits of what is still considered good taste.”⁵⁰ Indeed, Autokar, overcome with passion, kisses Yohannah and explains it as a thank-you gesture for her advice regarding the shape of Goethe’s statue. In truth, however, he is motivated by something else. “You love her because she is unripe,” he thinks to himself while forcefully gripping her face: “Because you can carve her image. From the unripe you create for yourself the mature figure” (2: 398). Reminiscent of Pygmalion, Autokar wants to fall in love with his own creation and does not allow Yohannah to stand on her own. Like Philip Lasker and Mr. Levi who capture Edith in their gaze, Autokar wishes to mold Yohannah’s sexuality through his eyes. Although he declares he is not interested in his country’s politics, Autokar is eager to leave his mark on Yohannah and metaphorically on her generation as he regularly belittles her Zionist ideals. Autokar symbolizes the artistic drive but also its dark underside, decadence, and a destructive force that both attracts and frightens

⁵⁰ Kurzweil “Shaul and Yohannah,” 287.

Yohannah who feels that her inner world with its many voices that “whisper wonderful things and carry her heart to miraculous places” (2: 248) has shut down. These voices had dominated her life “until she met the sculpting count, since then all the good voices have ceased, she doesn’t hear them anymore as though they are angry at her for betraying them....and the silence in her heart is great” (2: 248). Apparently, Yohannah does become Autokar’s sculpture as his passions overrule her inner world.⁵¹

TESTING IDEOLOGIES: GENDER, VIOLENCE AND WITHDRAWAL

As the complex relationship between Yohannah and the count progresses, Edith and Emil’s stormy liaison takes on an unexpected turn. At the beginning of the novel Edith finds out what she has already suspected: that Emil is a devoted Nazi working undercover as a police officer. Surprisingly, it does not immediately turn her against Emil as she becomes impressed with his new image as a man of deep belief: “Hitler gave me the feeling of connection between the land that I walk on, my blood and that mysterious thing that connects me to my fathers...Hitler is me, Edith. These are the roots from which my soul grows, do you understand?” (2: 138). All of a sudden he becomes someone her father would be proud of: “Just now a new halo was bestowed on his figure. I wish father had heard him talk” (2: 138), she thinks. This ironic depiction of Edith’s reaction highlights the level of repression experienced by German Jews in regard to the Nazi movement, but it also sheds a light on the master-

⁵¹ This is another common theme in the *Bildungsroman* where the hero is first absorbed in one world and then learns to separate himself from his mentors.

slave relationship of these two characters, the nationalities they represent and the extremity of their gender roles. When Edith fights with Emil over his beliefs he is shocked by this suddenly opinionated woman who stands before him returning his gaze, and immediately sets out to conquer and crush her resistance. When he looks at her she reminds him of the holy Saint Ursula, an image of virginity who died protecting her purity when the king of the Huns desired to marry her. “A strange figure, filled with secrets, one he has never touched, one who would never be touched by a man. The very idea of thinking about things that are fit for flesh and blood does not become the pale, silent face of the woman sitting on her chair without moving” (2: 349). Although his affair with Edith is now a year old, she still preserves an aura of primness that enrages him exactly because it cannot be touched. The patriarchal, sanctification of virginity becomes an obstacle for the predatory gaze. Now, riled up by the exposure of his Nazi identity and Edith’s initial resistance, he turns to violence. In a rough sexual scene Emil “jumps on his feet and in a brutal move throws her on the bed, rips the nightgown off her body and forcefully pushes her hair aside” (2: 352). Fraenkel equates the Nazi violent invasion with the violation of a woman’s body, a theme which recurs in the trilogy when different minor characters, who are avid Nazis, also humiliate and attack women.⁵² Thus, she creates another differentiation between the Zionist movement and patriarchy. By assigning the Zionist solution to

⁵² Again this is a case of a major character that is replicated by many others: like the Nazi lawyer Heinz hires, or one of the alley's characters—Hans Papir— a violent thug who was arrested for beating up a prostitute and then becomes a respected Nazi activist.

Yohannah Levi she expunges it of any chauvinist notions of nationalism.⁵³ Indeed, the men in the trilogy are typically devoted Communists or Nazis. The few Zionists among them are often hesitant and passive in their acts (Phillip Lasker and even Shaul) while the women are determined and ideologically driven (Bella, Yohannah). In an effort to persuade her of his ideological beliefs Emil takes Edith to hear Hitler's election propaganda and there she finally faces the meaning of his words: "We are no longer a people of poets, of philosophers and dreamers. We are fighters and politicians and we know what we are up against" (2: 356). Surrounded by the ecstatic crowds she suddenly feels just as suffocated as she did at home. From here a rift erupts between the two lovers and Edith's attention turns back to her family and particularly to her father who grows ill during that year.

Although Shaul receives little attention from Fraenkel, despite being one of the title protagonists, he too experiences a major test of his beliefs and ideologies. The opening of the second book finds both Shaul and Yohannah torn between their duties to the *tnua* and their relationship with others close to them. For Yohannah it is the count and for Shaul it is Otto, the alley's lovable newspaper seller, whom Shaul adores. Otto demands that Shaul will assist him in plastering Communist signs all over the city while evading the police. Shaul is attracted to the danger and the excitement of the political clandestine activity yet he feels that he is betraying his Zionist friends. Nevertheless he "changes the *tnua*'s shirt into a secular shirt with the feeling of a

⁵³ See Chapter 1.

traitor in his heart” (2: 360). Shaul goes out with Otto and is quickly arrested by the police. Thus, Shaul, who often berates Yohannah in the first volume for her strange behavior and her lack of commitment to the youth movement, is caught red-handed and fails to live up to his own standards. He then turns from an enthusiastic supporter into an antagonist within the Zionist movement and is therefore cleverly denied a leading role by Fraenkel, both in the *tnua* and in the trilogy. The road is now cleared for Yohannah and her own interpretation of Zionism.

The end of the second book maps two different trajectories for the Levi family. First and foremost the father, as the title anticipates, dies after falling ill, marking the end of an era for this family, as well as for Germany at large. His generation of assimilated, liberal, educated German Jews who treated their origin as a matter of the past has become irrelevant in the new political reality. As Heinz realizes, sitting by his father: “This rebellion against father is nothing but a rebellion against my own orphanhood, my lack of interest in continuing the heritage of the fathers” (2: 384). Although the Goethe statue is almost finished by Autokar, Goethe’s era, as Hitler’s speech indicates, has come to an end. While their father is dying the Levi children withdraw inside: “In the living room the newspapers accumulate and no one stops to read the news of these turbulent days” (2: 418), all but Edith, whose encounter with Hitler left a scar on her romantic vision of Emil and his ideology. Wherever she goes she cannot escape the large headlines from his speech “The Masters’ Race.” Within all this doom and death, however, another ritual occurs, Yohannah’s twelfth birthday, her

bat mitzvah which according to Jewish tradition signifies her passage into womanhood. Again, Yohannah brings together tradition and Zionism as she invites her *tnua* members to celebrate this defining moment in her life. Shortly thereafter, following her father's last wishes, the mother's parents arrive from Poland. Yohannah, who turns her family's kitchen Kosher, greets them with great excitement: "And within the heavy grief over father's death, a sliver of happiness enters Yohannah's heart with the new grandparents she loves" (2: 472). And while her father, Germany's past, and her older brother and sister's relationships all fade away towards the end of the second novel, it is Yohannah who finally begins to blossom, marking a new future for the Levi family and for the German Jews it represents. These two trajectories will then shape the next and final volume of the trilogy.

Bidding Goodbyes, the Beginning of the Journey: Third Volume

The third novel in Naomi Fraenkel's trilogy, titled simply *Sons*, brings to a closure the fate of the Levi family as well the rest of the characters populating the trilogy. Unlike the classic *Bildungsroman* in which the hero finds a new place in society through profession or marriage, Fraenkel's protagonists, and Yohannah in particular, face an unknown future. Fraenkel makes use of the built-in tension of the reader who knows the future turn of events as the new year, 1933, approaches. In light of this knowledge, every character's decision becomes crucial and final. Those who were in-between identities are forced to choose one, those who shut their eyes against the changes in Germany must open them, and all the major characters, and particularly

the younger generation, must face a rapid coming-of-age that will prepare them for their future journey. In a way Fraenkel only opens up the path for the *Bildungsroman* as her heroine's journey begins with the trilogy's end.

KILLING THE JEW WITHIN

While the issue of identity—political, religious, and gendered—resonates through the entire work, only in the third volume is it met with various options. Of all people, the third novel opens with the story of Dr. Blum. Bella's benefactor, who feels he is being forced to immigrate with her to Palestine and leave his ancestry behind, receives a surprise visit. His son Hans, whom he has not seen in ten years, shows up at his door, on his way to Denmark. Hans tells the doctor of his life growing up in a small all-Christian town with the knowledge that his father was Jewish: "The mark of Jewishness on my body and the priest comes to our house every day to preach a Catholic sermon" (3: 17). After his mother's rich suitor leaves her when she refuses to give up her half-Jewish son, Hans realizes that he can never erase that part of his identity. He travels to Berlin where he meets a new friend, Dicky Kell, who becomes a major-minor character in our story. Dicky too is half Jewish and tormented by his identity. Born to a Jewish father who converts to Christianity, and a Protestant mother, he feels unwelcomed by either religion. For Dicky the answer relies in science: "Truth is revealed only in the study of objective reality, science alone can provide the truth of life" (3: 26). Although at the opening of the novel he offers Hans to travel with him to

Denmark, where they will work as scientists, Dicky is drawn back to Germany and to the promise of reuniting with his Prussian ancestors. Consequently, he decides to explore his multiple identities by adopting different lifestyles, beginning with the Nazi one. To Hans's dismay Dicky becomes a passionate Nazi as a means of reintegrating himself back into German society and at the same time he insists Hans stays with him since he needs him, as Hans writes his father: "To watch his soul, and he knows it like me, he therefore holds on to me and doesn't let me go" (3: 331). According to Fraenkel the Jew is not only needed as the Nazi's Other, to define the Nazi identity, but is there to protect it from itself. Ultimately Dicky decides to enlist as a Nazi scientist. In a powerful scene Fraenkel delineates the triumph of hatred when Dicky and Hans look together in the mirror. The "mirror stage" was described by Jacques Lacan as a period of recognition in the infant's life. Lacan argued that: "The function of the mirror stage thus turns out, in my view, to be a particular case of the function of imagos, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality—or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*."⁵⁴ This tension between the two worlds was later expanded by Lacan's concept of the mirror as a metaphor for the Other's gaze. In Dicky's case, however, the Other, the Jew standing next to him and the one within, must be erased: "Dicky suddenly pulls out a small gun and shoots his image, straight into the stretched chest in the mirror. The mirror shattered and Dicky's

⁵⁴ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I," *Écrits* trans. Bruce Fink (1966; New York: W. W. Norton, 2002) 3.

image was buried under thousands of shards” (3: 457). Dicky kills the Jew within but at the same time frees Hans’ Jewish identity: Hans now leaves for Warsaw en route to Palestine, where he plans to reunite with his father.

RESURRECTION: RETRACING THE MATERNAL LINEAGE

Like many of the other plots here, Hans and Dicky’s story serves as a version of the Levi history as revealed by Heinz and Yohannah in the novel. In his own identity quest throughout the trilogy, Heinz remembers the tours of the family estate he took with his mother when she first met her German relatives. Upon seeing her they whispered to each other: “He brought her from ‘there.’ From the ‘dark ones,’ from the dark of the dark” (3: 97) referring to her Polish origin, although as we shall soon see, the dark feminine heritage already exists in the family yet its roots originate elsewhere. A particular portrait at the estate draws his mother’s attention—the only dark haired woman featured in the family lineage: “Her hair is black, her eyes dark and alert, her stature straight and proud, an esteemed lady” (3: 99). She is the Portuguese Hannah from Holland, who became Yohannah in Germany, the wife of the only Levi son who remained Jewish during the 18th century due to his wife’s insistence. A Marrano descendant, she represents a surprising Sephardi lineage within this family. Moreover, her "authentic" Jewish roots are the ones which maintained the

family's Jewish identity.⁵⁵ Later in the novel Heinz confronts his grandfather, the master storyteller, who often entertains his grandchildren with stories of their ancestors, regarding the obliteration of Portuguese Yohannah out of the family's collective memory. Heinz blames his grandfather for resenting Yohannah's insistence on their Jewish identity and her attempts to prevent the family's full assimilation into German aristocracy: "All of you begrudge her, grandfather, because she kept your Judaism, and to this day you are unable to defy her" (3: 216). Heinz, in fact, realizes that his Jewish heritage is almost the result of habit and routine rather than a deep belief, as his ancestors were unable to kill their inner Jew. Nevertheless, he soon discovers that: "When everyone yells that you are Jewish you cannot stop being Jewish" (3: 219). Just like Dicky Kell's story, the Levis are also left on the brink, a respected, wealthy family forever marked by their Judaism. While Heinz wishes the Jews would have just disappeared as a people, his sister celebrates her newly found Jewish identity.

Naturally, the story of the Portuguese Yohannah has some major repercussions for her namesake Yohannah Levi. In the second volume we saw how Yohannah is afraid of being chained to the Levi women as portrayed by her paternal grandmother, aunt Hermina and ultimately Edith. It is here, through Heinz's story that she discovers her true ancestry: "She is the Portuguese Hannah, Hannah the Marrano. Mother named

⁵⁵ Fraenkel anticipates here the notion of Sephardi Jews as the genuine representatives of Jewish identity featured in recent years in a number of literary works, most prominently by A.B. Yehoshua's *Mr. Mani* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1990).

only her after the Portuguese lady. Mother, unlike everyone else in the house, loved her” (3: 218). Yohannah comes full circle around as she returns to her original name Hannah both in the *tnua* and through her mother, thus linking the two together. She is finally able to draw a line that connects her with her mother as well as Judaism, one that will aid her in delineating her future path. Empowered by this discovery, Yohannah comes into her own in the third novel on several different levels. As an active member of the *tnua* she now faces the discrepancies between her ideals and reality. When Yohannah is out with Shaul, (still a closet Communist) to collect money for *Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael* [Jewish National Fund] she enters an apartment with several generations of women: a grandmother, mother and a crippled daughter, all of whom tried to immigrate to Palestine and were rejected on the grounds of their physical or occupational inadequacy. “Palestine is not for simple Jews, like us” (3:250), they explain. Yohannah, who carries the torch of Zionism wherever she goes, is struck by this blunt injustice and feels she cannot take the women’s money even though they are more than willing to donate it. Then, she brings home a young pioneer from Palestine who was sent to Germany to cure his failing kidneys. At first it seems that Zerach, the pioneer, is a figure right out of Yohannah’s books. He is tall and thin, miserably dressed, but always cheerful and singing Zionist songs in Hebrew. To her great dismay she quickly learns that Zerach is also quite fond of alcohol, cigarettes and the good life: “During the day Zerach is occupied with the class struggle and at night he runs around with Ferdinand, Inga and Ruth, and their entourage of friends to

theaters, cafés and nightclubs” (3: 447). Yohannah realizes that perhaps not everything she was taught in the *tnua* about the purity of body and soul had been completely true. At first she is hurt by Zerach’s behavior, but watching him do as he pleases, going through life as a pioneer, a man, and a Communist, without any contradictions, frees her to accept her own contradictions as well as Shaul’s. She now realizes she can reconnect with Jewish tradition without betraying her Zionist friends, just like Shaul can support both them and the Communists. In essence, through Zerach’s character Yohannah discovers the intoxicating freedom of choice and immediately sets out to apply it.

WOMANHOOD RESISTED

On the physical and sexual level Yohannah deals with traditional notions of womanhood and the expectations of those surrounding her, especially the men in her life, regarding this maturity. Her first encounter with the manner in which Autokar sees her occurs when she finds her full portrait in his studio. There she discovers:

A woman of about twenty [...] the face is like Yohannah’s, a little girl’s face, and the eyes are very old. Dark shadows surround the feminine body like a garment. It is transparent and a nude body can be seen through it, he even drew her breasts—the more she looks at herself there [...] looking like a real woman, the more ashamed [she is]. And when Autokar’s brush strokes the naked body, Yohannah blushes and a vague, burning feeling of sin is in her soul (3: 149).

Feeling violated, Yohannah refuses to continue and sit for him at the price of being turned into a sexual object. Denying the objectifying gaze means escaping her sister’s

fate as Bella once notes of Edith: “Too many stares have robbed her of her youth’s glow. Too many lusting glances hurt this beautiful woman” (2: 205).

Even when Yohannah gets her period, another feminine rite-of-passage, it does not provide the safety she longs for. On the one hand she is finally like everyone else, although she doesn’t feel like a woman: “[she looks like] a scarecrow on a stick...no wonder that out of her entire body Autokar can use only her face” (3: 209). On the other hand, she is worried about the possible consequences of officially becoming a woman. She would now fit into Autokar’s feminine model of a fully blossomed, sensual woman and she would need to share the news with Shaul according to the *tnua*’s rules. But Yohannah does neither. Instead, she keeps the news to herself, and moves on to explore her emotional world. She refuses to meet Autokar and toward the end of the novel when they bid goodbye he holds her again “but when he asks to kiss the trembling mouth she pulls her head away in a swift movement” (3: 642). Similarly, Shaul, whose nightly caressing during their Pioneer camp, in the name of “free love” promoted by the *tnua*, bother her deeply, is finally forced to accept Yohannah on her terms. When he asks her to be his girlfriend “with all the consequences” (3: 622) she refuses, demanding that he voice his emotions just as the previous generation did: “Really Shaul, is that what they used to say? *Harei at mekudeshet lee* [Behold, you are consecrated to me]?...it’s the most beautiful thing you can tell someone” (3: 624). Shaul agrees and the two kiss passionately for the first time.

For Edith, too, the last volume marks a time of change but unlike her younger sister, she merely replaces the background as her personal narrative remains the same. The opening of *Sons* finds Edith in the house supposedly mourning for her father but in truth agonizing over Emil's secret: "A halo of holiness was attached to her and she remained lonely and trapped in her thoughts and doubts and only her heart cried: 'It's a lie! I am lying to all of you! None of you feels or knows how corrupted I am!'" (3: 36). Emil himself is locked up and only many months later she goes to visit him in prison. At the same time, a new man enters her life, one who should have been Emil's complete opposite, but appears to be his mirror image. Erwin, Heinz's school friend and a devoted Communist who was ousted from the party after refusing to cooperate with the Nazis, moves in with the Levi family. Erwin is attracted to Edith almost against his will as she represents everything he fights against in Germany, but finds she remains completely indifferent to him in an arrogant and distanced manner. When he picks her engraved napkin at the dining room she points him instead to a "white napkin, intended for guests, with no silver ring or engraved name. Her finger is on the anonymous napkin as though she is pointing to a domain that cannot be crossed" (3: 226). Before she visits Emil Erwin finds her upset and discovers her secret. He joins her on the car ride and seems to adopt Emil's conduct: "There is no softness left in his heart. He wants to see her succumb to him, obey without hesitation, follow his will with no barriers, he wants to see her face twists with the pain he will cause her" (3: 348). Again, Fraenkel equates masculinity, ideology, and misogyny by gendering the

two clashing ideologies in the trilogy and painting them as aggressive and chauvinist.⁵⁶ The two become a couple shortly after that encounter, yet once more Edith is deserted in the name of ideology. Erwin is sent by the party to Moscow to face what they consider his betrayal after he refuses to cooperate with the Nazi party. Although this journey spells almost certain death or imprisonment for him he feels it is his duty to obey it and explains “a man cannot escape his own self” (3: 533). Edith remains behind but, nevertheless, before the very end she rejects Phillip and his marriage-offer for the last time thus refusing to commit herself to an unhappy marriage in a confinement she has experienced her entire life.

THE COLLAPSE OF PATRIARCHY

When Hitler wins the election the Levi family and their friends are stunned but determined. Paradoxically, it is Emil Ripke who shows up at their house, this time wearing SS uniform, and urges the grandfather to leave Germany immediately: “You are deluding yourselvesyour money will not salvage you...Adolf Hitler will keep all his promises to [the German] people. Including his promise that Germany will be clean of Jews” (3: 606). When the family convenes to discuss their future plans, and the grandfather learns that Heinz already transferred most of their bank accounts and possessions abroad, he is finally defeated. Unable to bid Germany and his past goodbye he commits suicide on the mother’s grave (who was, as we recall, buried on

⁵⁶ She also reveals the resemblance between the supposedly contradicting ideologies.

his estate's grounds). Hence the last Levi patriarch is gone and with him the arrogant male role-model, now obsolete. In his will, the grandfather demands that his grandchildren leave Europe and so the family splits: Yohannah and her younger brother Bomba leave for Palestine while the rest of them immigrate to the US. Paradoxically, Bella and Phillip, the initial arbiters of the move to Palestine decide to stay in Germany because, as Phillip puts it “I will leave this place only when the last Jew does” (3: 637).

“It’s So Wonderful to Run Toward a Secret”

In reviewing the negative critiques which greeted poet Leah Goldberg’s 1946 novel *Vehu ha’or* [There Comes the Light], Tamar Hess writes:

According to the period’s standards *Vehu ha’or* places at its center the wrong protagonist (a young woman), from the wrong class (assimilated middle class), at the wrong place (urban Eastern Europe), at the wrong time (between two world wars), and apparently weaves its plot in the wrong sphere (private versus public).⁵⁷

Merely ten years later, although Naomi Fraenkel failed the exact same standards detailed by Hess, she was embraced by critics and readers alike. The difference between these two women lies in their writing style and more specifically in Fraenkel’s choice of the *Bildungsroman* as her guiding model. Unlike Goldberg’s lyrical novel which was rejected by the critics as personal and minor, Fraenkel answers the literary criteria of her time both in her poetics and thematic—adapting the Zionist narrative only to conceal within it a subversive heroine.

⁵⁷ Hess, "Onsham" 275.

On the surface, all the roads in *Shaul and Yohannah* lead to the Zionist realization of immigration to Palestine. Ultimately though, it is a particular solution designed by a particular young girl. Thus, a closer reading of the trilogy reveals an interesting interpretation of both the national narrative and the role gender plays within it. Although the “solution” is a Zionist one, Yohannah reaches it through religious orientation, feminine heritage, and Sephardi roots, freely appropriating what she values from the different domains.⁵⁸ Hence, she manages to avoid a religious, subjugating female position—like her grandmother—but also rejects succumbing her body and soul to ideology, like Bella. Fraenkel does not “write from the margins” as other writers have (see for example Batya Kahana in the next chapter) but takes a mainstream, dominant genre, and ideology, and places the margins right at its core. Consequently she employs what Orly Lubin, writing about *Little Women*, termed a double standard system:

To be included in the canon the text had to agree to the centrality of the masculine norms and give up the possibility of representing the female experience from the female perspective; or to present a double system which contains both the dominant male norms and an alternative of sorts. This duplication meant that on the one hand these texts fulfill certain values that allow them to stay within the canon and on the other hand they project a series of values that maintain, more or less, options which were excluded from the canonic center.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Although the Mizraḥi—a religious Zionist movement—was founded at the beginning of the 20th century, Fraenkel's Zionist movement in 1930s Germany is a socialist-secularist one.

⁵⁹ Orly Lubin, *Isha koret* 19.

Thus, Fraenkel accepts the genre, wraps it in the Zionist answer to the problem of assimilation in the Diaspora and then places a minor voice at the center of this narrative. As I have shown in my reading, she manages to produce an alternative Zionist model that is not based on the negation of the Diaspora, as advocated by different streams of Zionism.⁶⁰ Thus, she succeeds in rewriting Shaked's "meta narrative," not by metaphorically killing the previous generation but by creating its parallel maternal version. Yohannah's story is not one of obliteration, nor of self-hatred on the contrary, she produces a positive account by reconnecting with her past, bringing in both her mother's Jewish heritage, and the Sephardi one, into the male Zionist narrative. Thus, the fusion created by Fraenkel draws a strong, straight, consecutive line between the Diaspora and the new Jewish state, a highly inappropriate stand at a time when: "The negation of the Diaspora and the diasporic lifestyle, and particularly the stereotypization of the diasporic Jew, functioned as a hidden mechanism that stressed the boundaries of the national Zionist religion and its superiority to traditional Judaism."⁶¹ Unlike Shaul, the alleged male hero of this trilogy, Yohannah never fully internalizes this rhetoric. In fact, she expropriates the public for the private, by turning Zionism into her own private mission: not only an alternative to her father's legacy but one that reunites her with her mother's world that is now nearly gone. Thus, Yohannah succeeds not only in creating a simple inversion

⁶⁰ For the different constructions of the new Jewish man see Anita Shapira, *Yehudim ḥadashim, yehudim yeshanim* [New Jews Old Jews] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1997) 155-174.

⁶¹ Almog, *Hatsabar*—128.

but: "In moving outside an oedipal dialectic that insists upon revealing the father as law, as the gaze, as bodiliness, or as the symbolic, and to develop a new dialectic that refuses to describe the father function as it were univocal and ahistorical."⁶² Only through the maternal lineage Yohannah is able to fulfill the national demands and she does so by paving a new road to Palestine, the road of the Jewish Zionist daughter.⁶³

⁶² Patricia Yeager and Beth Kowalski-Wallace, introduction, *Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989): xi.

⁶³ As first noted by Shirav "Derekh ha 'em."

CHAPTER 3
THE PORTRAIT OF THE WOMAN AS A YOUNG ARTIST
SEXUAL IDENTITY AND THE NATION
IN RACHEL EYTAN, MIRIAM SCHWARTZ, AND BATYA KAHANA

In 1962 Rachel Eytan's debut novel *Barakia haḥamishi* [The Fifth Heaven] was published to rave reviews.¹ The young author enjoyed critical acclaim, her writing was compared to Brenner's and reviews of her novel, as well as a dozen interviews with her, were plastered throughout the period's newspapers. Her fame, however, was not only literary. As one (female!) columnist wrote:

The new Israeli literary sensation—the young writer Rachel Eytan, the author of the Fifth Heaven is among those women whose good looks you notice first....we're used to seeing beauties like her in cafés...but she doesn't attend the cafés, her life isn't bohemian, she lives in a nice house near Tel Aviv, she is married to an architect, a mother of two and in general lives a normal and organized life.²

According to the journalist, the raving beauty, who shockingly wrote a successful and complex novel, was thankfully a devoted mother and wife, one who lives “an organized life” quite different from the social decay she portrays in her novel. One can hardly imagine a similar depiction of successful male authors like Amos Oz and A.B. Yehosua who began publishing during the same years. This short paragraph demonstrates, certainly in a blunt way, the manner in which Israeli women novelists

¹ Rachel Eytan, *Barakia haḥamishi* [The Fifth Heaven] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1962).

² Tamar Avidar, “Na'arat hazohar nitgalta kemeh aberet mazhira” [The Glamour Girl is Revealed as a Brilliant Writer], *Laisha* 25 Sept. 1962.

were treated by critics and journalists: as exceptional phenomena, as targets of gossip and sometimes contempt, but hardly as serious writers who chose a literary career for themselves.

The three novels discussed in this chapter, Rachel Eytan's *Barakia haḥamishi* [The Fifth Heaven; 1962], Miriam Schwartz's *Korot Hava Gottlieb* [Eve Gottlieb; 1968], and Batya Kahana's *Haḥitzim mimkha vahal'a* [The Arrows are Beyond Thee; 1960], posit the question of mediating their heroines' sexual, artistic and national identities, and emphasize the conflict between the personal and the collective narratives. Put together, the novels cover the life-span of a young woman from childhood to motherhood: from Eytan's pre-adolescent heroine, to Schwartz's young woman who comes into her own, to Kahana's married housewife and mother who longs to break free of her life. Reading the novels together creates a narrative of the different roles women occupy within the nuclear family, while also grappling with the national models that become affiliated with it. Thus, the broken homes depicted in each novel clearly relate to their surroundings. Nevertheless, as we shall see, in order to read the family as a national allegory, to use Fredric Jameson's conceptualization, it must exist as a whole, if imagined, construction. Jameson famously argued that in third-world literatures: "The story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society."³ Yet, the novels read here pull their heroines out of the confinement of the nuclear family,

³ Fredric Jameson, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text* 17 (Fall 1987): 69.

which supposedly stands for the nation. In fact, I will argue that the three novelists offer a counter-allegorical move in their works, where women represent women rather than symbols of the nation. Furthermore, if the fragmented structure of the family and women's roles within it subvert the national model, revealing its fractures, the period depicted in all three novels—the years of the British mandate and the first years of the state—further emphasizes this tension. This is a period of uncertainty, of change, hope and disappointment: a moment before the foundations of Israeli identity are molded, a moment of adolescence in between childhood and adulthood. The national ambivalence serves as a perfect background for those struggling in its margins right before these margins are aligned, flattened, and adjusted to fit the ruling patriarchal discourse. The protagonists in the three novels discussed here find their voice in a time of trouble and uncertainty even though it is barely strong enough to pave an alternative route. What they offer is the marginal, unfamiliar point of view of women who are not emblems of national patriotism, neither proud mothers of dead soldiers nor passive lovers waiting at the window. Their depiction is of independent women, artists, and sexual beings who long to explore the world beyond the domestic sphere intended for them.

As was the case in the previous chapter, our discussion will also look at the reception of these novelists during the 1960s. Unlike Naomi Fraenkel's trilogy, we will look at a wider range of works and reviews that will map a more comprehensive picture of the literary establishment's reaction to women writers. While Eytan, for

example, was warmly received, all three novelists were categorized as “feminine” to some extent and therefore necessarily inferior to their male peers. Ultimately, we will see how the critics have avoided or negated issues of gender and nation raised in these novels, and have therefore overlooked a line of interpretation which ties together the different elements in each text. Finally, my reading will reveal a subversive approach (manifested on different levels) to the role of women within the national narrative, and will present these works as a compelling alternative to the canonical texts published during their time.

“HOW SHARP IS THE PLEASURE OF CHOICE”: *The Fifth Heaven*

Rachel Eytan's critically acclaimed novel *The Fifth Heaven* (1962) opens with a male character, Dov, whose voice is heard alongside a young girl, Maya, throughout the novel.⁴ The two plots mirror one another and where the young man fails the girl triumphs. Dov Markovski is clearly constructed in the image of the *talush*, as it was masterfully shaped in the writings of Berdichevski, Brenner and Gnessin in the early 1900s. He is a tormented intellectual who cannot write and who lacks both a reading audience and romantic success. A familiar character in Hebrew literature, he seems to replicate the failures of his predecessors in their efforts to produce the new Jewish

⁴ All quotations hereafter are from Rachel Eytan, *The Fifth Heaven*, trans. Philip Simpson (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985). Page citations are marked in the body of the text, the page numbers refer to the Hebrew original and the English translation respectively.

man. But it is Maya who follows the road less taken of Dvora Baron and Leah Goldberg, offering a unique feminine take on the classic coming of age story.

Rachel Eytan (1931 - 1987) was born in Tel Aviv where she spent part of her childhood in children's institutions later moving to a kibbutz. She began publishing short stories in the early 1960s, and in 1962, her debut novel, *The Fifth Heaven*, came out. Four years later the novel was awarded the prestigious Brenner literary Prize. In 1967, Eytan moved to New York where she continued to write while also teaching at Hofstra University. Her second and last novel *Shida veshidot*, which candidly dealt with its heroine's sexual escapades, was published in 1974 and was generally rejected by Israeli critics who claimed it was a cheap, sensational work. Eytan also published several essays on the subject of Jewish Oral Law [*Torah she-be-`al peh*] but those received little attention. Chapters from a third, incomplete novel were published in 1985 in the Israeli press.

Eytan's *The Fifth Heaven* was undoubtedly the most well received novel of the three works discussed in this chapter, albeit not without reservations. As we have seen in the opening of this chapter, critics praised the novel and the new talent that was revealed in the image of the beautiful young writer: "A young woman, a housewife and mother, who sat **one day** at her desk, wrote an excellent book and revealed a rare talent without any former writing experience."⁵ A more serious approach was taken by

⁵ Tamar Avidar, "*Na'arat Hazohar*" (emphasis mine). Although she was commended for her male writing style and mastery of the language, out of the three writers discussed here, Eytan was the most vulnerable in terms of biased reviews. A beautiful,

poet Dahlia Ravikovitch, who wrote that “Rachel Eytan writes prose and bravely renounces any metaphysical meaning, devoting herself to raw material. Such hungry and meaty writing indicates rare patience and concentration skills.”⁶

Interestingly, three major scholars, who were also key arbiters of the state generation’s literature, tagged Eytan in a similar manner, even though they addressed her work from different angles. Dan Miron, in two essays he published in *Haaretz*, tried to define the reason for Eytan’s success and identified three main elements: the social themes of the novel, which were hardly treated elsewhere in Israeli literature at the time; the strong and honest depictions of these themes, creating an authentic and dark impression of the harsh world she describes; and a third element, the writer herself who was, Miron suggests, a “new type” not brought up on the “ideological school of the youth movements, nor the heroic enterprise of the War of Independence,” but rather a student of the “tough and dark school of life.”⁷ Her artistic achievement, however, was another matter. According to Miron, while Eytan brought insight and a powerful writing style to the Israeli novel, her abilities were still raw and many of the chapters “block the way to aesthetic elevation and conquest.” The novel’s biggest problem, claims Miron, is the lack of a thematic and philosophical focal point rendering the virtuoso language pointless, her sentences are “flirty” and her rhythm

glamorous society woman, often described in the papers as the Israeli Brigitte Bardot, Eytan fought the image of the bored housewife in almost every interview she gave.

⁶ Dahlia Ravikovitch, “De’ah aḥ eret al barakia haḥ amishi” [A Different Opinion about The Fifth Heaven], *Amot* 1 (Sept.-Oct. 1963): 97-100.

⁷ Dan Miron, “Barakia haḥ amishi leRachel Eytan” [Rachel Eytan’s The Fifth Heaven], *Haaretz* 7 June 1962.

“chatty”. Because Eytan could not move in her narrative beyond the literary-emotional reality of the text, writes Miron, she beautifies it by tying “colorful bows of ‘improved language’” to it. He even goes further than that to say that the novel “is one of the most artificial, meaningless, linguistic constructions that were created within Israeli literature in the past few years.” In addition, he accuses Eytan of identifying too closely with her protagonist while failing to provide a reality “depicted from the distance of maturity, wisdom and poetics.”⁸

Like Miron, Gershon Shaked and Gavriel Moked also admired the originality of the new writer, both stressing her difference from the *Palmach* generation (which they themselves often attacked). The two critics emphasize Eytan’s psychological abilities and the depiction of her characters from the inside out, dealing with “real people with real problems.”⁹ However, both point to what Shaked terms “a lack of coherent plot,” while Moked warns of a certain mannerism in the novel which may fail the author in her future writing. Unlike Miron, Shaked and Moked praise Eytan’s writing style mostly as an alternative to the *Palmach* generation. Almost all the critics, whether those reading the novel in Hebrew during the early 1960s, or their American colleagues reviewing the work in the mid-1980s, when it was first published in English, agreed that the plot was marginal in the novel and some even claimed it “missing in action.” The general agreement was that Eytan managed to create

⁸ The novel was loosely based on Eytan’s life and Miron seems to be insinuating to it in his comments.

⁹ Gershon Shaked, “Al bnei adam shel mamash” [On Real People], *Min hayesod* 21 June 1962: 21-22.

authentic and psychologically credible characters, as well as manipulate the different layers of Hebrew language, but failed to create a cohesive narrative. Others describe her writing as fragmentary, “lacking unity in both pattern and plot,”¹⁰ creating a sense of incompleteness: “All of this poetic prose, rich in imagery and sonority, overlays a simple plot that is then fragmented into shards, told through the reflecting surfaces of each of these shards, so that there is a feeling of disjointedness, or disorientation... about it.”¹¹ How can we account, then, for this discrepancy between the praise of originality and style, and the attack on or sometimes complete disregard of content? The answer lies in the history of women’s writing.

While some theorists of the novel like Georg Lukàcs attacked the notion of a fragmented narrative, as we have previously seen, this style of writing is exactly what has characterized women’s writing for decades. As Elaine Showalter has shown, women’s writing is often “stitched” together as a quilt where instead of one linear narrative, torn scraps are sewn together in order to create a more circular work with multiple centers. Thus, the female narrative is often characterized as piecing together different elements while avoiding their complete fusion, creating a collage rather than a smooth, cohesive narrative.¹² On the other hand, men’s writing, as Orna Kazin has recently described, “Does not acknowledge partial, deconstructed, dynamic phases of

¹⁰ Dov Bar-Nir, “Olam ḥ oreg” [A Deviate World], *Al Hamishmar* 18 May 1962.

¹¹ “Fifth Heaven Near Tel Aviv,” *The Hamptons Chronicle* October 1985: B1.

¹² The more pragmatic reasons for this type of writing (lack of time and space devoted to it) are discussed for example in Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; San Diego: Harcourt, 1989); and Lubin, 21. For more on this and on Woolf in particular, see Feldman, *No Room* 13-21, 91-11.

the subject...and acts out of an inherent need to rule and regulate.”¹³ Additionally, as we will see throughout the chapter, these three novels demonstrate to some extent Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia where multiple meanings are embedded in the written text, some manifested in the open while others remain hidden as they resist hegemonic novelistic patterns. Thus, reviews of Schwartz and Kahana, written by both men and women, will clearly show how aspects of their novels which obeyed the rules of the canon were praised, where the parts which challenged it were undermined by the critics.

In Eytan's case, a central theme which was all but ignored was the national realm in the novel, probably because instead of corresponding to the heroine’s coming of age story it collides with it. For critics and scholars Eytan failed the test of “the artist as a young man” because her narrative does not follow the male *Bildungsroman* model (see Chapter 2) by rejecting Shaked’s Zionist meta-narrative, and although it offers a stylistic alternative, that’s where its contribution ends.¹⁴ Even Shaked, who wrote favorably about the novel, overlooks Maya’s role as a leading protagonist, claiming that the importance of the book lies "not in Maya's story but in the writing style...the psychological penetration and the complex structuring of human

¹³ Orna Kazin, “Ha’im zo besakh hakol sifrut gvarim?” [Is it Just ‘Men’s Literature?’], *Haaretz (Sfarim)* 2 Apr. 2007: 38-40.

¹⁴ Naomi Franenkel provided a seemingly opposite example when she followed the rigid model of the *Bildungsroman* and led to the Zionist national resolution, but like Eytan her heroine is a young girl who does not correspond with the literary norms of the period. Consequently, both heroines were treated by the critics as representing a personal narrative.

situations.”¹⁵ Thus, Shaked complements Eytan for writing about “real people,” as he terms it, while ignoring her very “real” heroine.

FAILED FATHERHOOD

Maya’s short history is a painful one. Her father is a political activist who divorces her mother and marries one of his many mistresses. After giving birth to a son, the new wife, (a classic evil step-mother in Maya’s mind), sends Maya to a children’s institution. Coincidentally, after failing to support himself in the new political institutes of the *Yishuv*, Dov, the male protagonist, reluctantly joins the institute as a teacher after begging his old friend Senya—now a local party hack—for financial help. Senya represents everything Dov despises: greed, hedonism and small time politics, yet, at the same time, Dov envies his leisurely lifestyle and casual flirtations with women.¹⁶ It happens, however, that Dov and Maya have already met before. Dov is a member of the Marxist political party led by Maya’s father. A picture of the family with Dov is found in both the father’s and mother’s houses. In each, one parent is cut out and so the only two who remain are Maya and Dov, connected through the separation and hatred of the other two. Tamar Mishmar claims that the photograph serves as a reminder of the third person Maya needs to cut out of the

¹⁵ Gershon Shaked, “Al benei adam.”

¹⁶ This was also a reoccurring figure in the *Tehiyah* literature where Brenner and Gnessin’s protagonists often competed with deceitful charmers.

picture, in order to maintain her independent identity.¹⁷ According to Mishmar, *The Fifth Heaven* provides a double coming-of-age story of both the man and the girl, and only when his narrative collapses is she able to write her own. To my mind, however, seeking to metaphorically kill Dov means adopting a masculine literary stance à la Harold Bloom's anxiety of influence (see discussion in Chapter 1). Maya, in fact, establishes her voice as a woman and as a writer alongside Dov and although as he deteriorates she blossoms, his story highlights hers as he becomes her weaker inverted image rather than a powerful literary shadow. Yet Dov is not only a political rival of Maya's father, but possibly also a romantic one. Since Eytan hints there was an affair between Dov and Maya's mother, his potential fatherhood also becomes an option in the novel. In Maya's case both fathers fail within the family structure as well as in the national realm where Maya's father remains the leader of the (marginal) Marxist party, while Dov eventually joins the British army after failing as a writer and a lover.

ALTERNATIVE FAMILY

Ironically titled *The Fifth Heaven*, (a reference to the heaven of refuge—*Ma'on*— in the Talmud, where angels reside), the institute which is located in a “typical” *moshava* is constructed as a microcosm of social interactions. A slowly dying kingdom, it provides Eytan with the perfect setting for examining human

¹⁷ Tamar Mishmar, “Ein osim leḥ em meidiologia” [You Do Not Make Bread out of Ideology: The Two-Fold Education Story in Rachel Eytan's *The Fifth Heaven*], *Te'oria ubikoret* 7 (1995): 147-157.

relations, family roles, and gender identities. The girls' quarters are dominated by the "queen of bees"—Bat Sheva—who is described in powerful superlatives: "The point upon which all their secretive glances are focused, the source of all joy and pain, doses of delight, degradation, fear and compassion" (50; 62). Bat Sheva's rule is cruel and unforgiving and she often sends the girls on torture missions. In a place where the words "mother" or "father" are considered obscene, Bat Sheva fills the role of authority, and any attempt at rebellion is brutally oppressed. Yet Maya soon discovers certain powers in herself that cannot be easily destroyed. Her talent lies in storytelling, and later writing, skills which determine her survival both in and out of the institute.¹⁸

For example, when she first arrives she is expected to relate her personal story:

Again she didn't really want to tell, wanting and not wanting. She was aware from the start of the tragic beauty of her story and the impression it made on others. Here the one whose 'sufferings' are most intense stands the best chance of melting the barrier of suspicion and hatred. Her prestige would improve, just as in the hospital the greatest prestige always goes to those with high temperatures and terminal diseases (63; 81).

Interestingly, the stories most sought after by the institute's children, are those which possess national components, relating their personal experience to the struggle for a new Jewish identity. This need to belong and to define the self through the nation both shapes and erases identity. Any oppressed group, claims Terry Eagleton in "Nationalism: Irony and Commitment," strives towards transforming its negative identity into a positive self affirmation: "Ironically, then, a politics of difference or

¹⁸ Somewhat reminiscent of Scheherazade in *1001 Arabian Nights*, whose stories keep her alive.

specificity is in the first place the cause of sameness and universal identity—the right of a group victimized in its particularity to be on equal terms with others as far as their self-determination is concerned.”¹⁹ In other words, to enter the “hall of national identity,” other alternatives must be negated. For Maya this erasure will later serve as a source of power to critique and create under the gaze of patriarchal rule.

NATIONALIZING SEXUALITY

As in all the novels discussed in this chapter, the national story does not take center stage in the book, even though *The Fifth Heaven* takes place during the stormy mandatory period in British ruled Palestine. Nevertheless, the effects of the national discourse clearly penetrate the characters’ daily lives. Both men and women define and establish their gender and sexual identities through the national narrative. The gendering of nation necessarily means the gendering of its subjects: “The Motherland is a woman’s body and as such is ever in danger of violation—by ‘foreign’ males,” while men who cannot defend “their woman” lose their claim to her and in the process also their manhood.²⁰ Eytan’s novel is embedded with countless examples of how the national, Zionist public discourse invades the private experience. Thus, Bat Sheva’s status is founded after her father is killed by Arabs when “she was sent to the institute from the house of Officer Tamarin in a police squat car” (94; 122). When Maya is

¹⁹ Terry Eagleton, “Nationalism: Irony and Commitment,” 27.

²⁰ V. Spike Peterson, “Gendered Nationalism: Reproducing ‘Us’ versus ‘Them,’” *The Women and War Reader*, eds. Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (New York: New York University Press, 1998) 44.

forced to tell her sob story of arriving at the institute—for Bat Sheva’s amusement—she reveals that her parents separated and is asked if her mother is a whore. One of the girls volunteers that: “A whore is a woman who betrays the Jewish people” (66; 84), and Maya quickly objects asserting her mother does not date “other nations.”²¹ Similarly, one of the young women working at the institute is fired after dating British officers, and a leaflet warning Jewish women from such association is spread around the *moshava*. Thus, the national and the sexual are closely intertwined in the period depicted in the novel. In Chapter 2 we explored Michel Foucault's intertwining of language and power to which he added the element of desire in his later *The History of Sexuality*. Thus, within the national discourse the body, and especially the female one, becomes a site of struggle demanding a close watch and constant monitoring. Accordingly, “Power’s hold on sex is maintained through language, or rather through the act of discourse that creates, from the very fact that it is articulated, a rule of law.”²² These power relations were also evident within the Zionist narrative which glorified manliness, denied feminine-diasporic-passivity and at the same time

²¹ This is my translation of the Hebrew which reads “shum ‘am aḥ er” and is not reflected in the English translation. Relationships forged between Jewish women and British soldiers were considered a disgrace by the local Jewish community and were a sore point in the national struggle, sometimes leading to violent results. For more on this see the recent study by Dvora Bernstein, *Nashim bashulaim* [Women on the Margins] (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2008).

²² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (1976; New York: Vintage, 1990) 83.

maintained the ideal of the land as woman and the passion for it as the one determining national struggle.²³

In *The Fifth Heaven* it is Bat Sheva who manipulates authority over the body, determining her own power through it. Bat Sheva's sadistic rule is exemplified, among other things, in controlling bodily functions: deciding when the girls are allowed to use the bathroom, or which one of them will be "chosen" to escort her to the toilet; determining food allowances and inflicting violent punishments on those who stray. But perhaps the most striking example is the game Bat Sheva invents titled "a tour of the country." In it, each night, another girl is instructed to draw the borders of Palestine with her hands on Bat Sheva's bare back. The semi-erotic act of inscribing the outline of the land on the naked body bluntly reproduces the national discourse of territory and awards Bat Sheva the power she craves.²⁴ This notion will be taken into new extremes in Orly Castel-Bloom's 1992 novel *Dolly City* where a frantic "Jewish mother" carves the borders of Israel on her son's back and watches them move and change as she obsesses over his health. Postcolonial theory has emphasized the role of maps as a graphic language of power emphasizing that "mapping operates in hegemonic discourses as a form of mimetic representation—it textually represents the

²³ For some interesting examples see the case of Netiva Ben-Yehuda in Feldman, *No Room*, 180-191, and Vol. 5 of *Sadan: Meḥ karim be-sifrut ivrit*.

²⁴ While there are certainly lesbian elements in this game, their meaning is repressed in the name of the national touch; a different manifestation is evident in Batya Kahana's novel which will also be discussed in this chapter.

gaze.”²⁵ Just as a whore is someone who betrays the Jewish people, Bat Sheva becomes the priestess of purity since her father was killed in the Arab riots, and she is forbidden for touch unless it is the national one which provides pleasure and triumph. Maya, trying to resist the act, questions the validity of the temporary drawing by crying “but surely you don’t expect me to keep it [the map] there!” (52; 64), and is publicly humiliated. Thus, whereas Bat Sheva seeks pleasure by allying physical contact with the national utopia of the land, Maya will undermine its very tangibility contesting the colonizing gaze of the map through her emancipating—unnational—writing.

Meanwhile, Dov finds he is unable to free himself of the national/sexual equation. During his stay at the institute he aggressively courts another teacher—Frieda. Like Dov, she is constructed in the image of the proud, intellectual *halutza* filled with ideals and sexual constraints. Frieda hides her figure in old clothes, listens to Beethoven in her room and expects integrity and purity of her peers. From Dov she demands national accountability: “‘Do you really feel no remorse?’ He felt wild fear spring inside him... ‘That you didn’t enlist with the rest of them?’” (202; 267). But her character, a female mirror image of Dov, exposes yet again the false national premise of a new Jewish identity.

When I first came to this country, the pioneers’ house where I stayed was emptied each night of all those girls who ‘know about life’... I found a suite of Bach on one of the radio stations whose mysteries

²⁵ Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, introduction, *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994) 8.

permeate the darkness. I felt ‘This is it, all that I will ever have—is mine! Everything that is eternally pure, everything I desire...a pool of light, a pool that is greater than you and is all yours, no man will steal it from you, ever... (192; 253).

Although sexually she rejects Dov, she is willing, like many female characters in Gnessin and Brenner’s stories, to “sacrifice” her virginity and sexual morals for Senya, the dashing womanizer whose corruption invades both the private and public realms.²⁶ Interestingly, she does not succumb to Dov the intellectual revolutionary nor to another underground activist who flirts with her, but to the shrewd, heartless business man who seeks, by his own admission: “An unpretentious wife without pride, who’ll carry her soul in her body like a dead tooth in her mouth. He’ll kill off all her nerves one after the other, and she’ll be happy when he rewards her by giving her his name, nights at the theater, standard of living, appearances beside her in public, and sophisticated household appliances...Most women learn to accept this arrangement sooner or later” (269; 356). Eytan depicts here, not without irony, the male archetype in her novel: chauvinist, arrogant and even cruel.²⁷ When Dov fails to (violently) kiss Frieda, he turns, in an ironic twist on the national ethos, to the land as his feminine solace: “All those foolish remarks about contact with the holy land danced in his brain like devils...Suddenly, his nerves shattered, he fell forward and dug his teeth into the

²⁶ Two such examples are found in Uri Nissan Gnessin’s “Hatzida” [Sideways], *Kol ketvei* [Collected Works] (Merhavia: Sifriyat Po‘alim, 1946) 87-116; and Yosef Haim Brenner’s *Shekhol vekishalon* [Breakdown and Bereavement] (New York: A. Y. Shtibl, 1920).

²⁷ This depiction also applies to Maya’s father as well as other men in her life. For Dov it is the emblem of the man he could never become.

wet turf” (204; 270). Although Dov’s erotic desires are transferred from woman to land, he is unable to perform his masculine-Zionist role with either one.

WRITING IDENTITY

As is the case in previous depictions of the *talush*, Dov is unable to perform sexually as well as creatively. Indeed, Maya’s writing is significant in the novel not only in itself and for her-coming-of-age story—both as a girl and as a writer—but also in comparison to Dov. Since the novel moves between between Dov’s and Maya’s voices, the comparison between them demands further attention. Where she produces, he only dreams of writing: “Dov always saw a writing desk as his final, proper place...He saw himself in an ideal state of true and fitting peace, in a short pause for thought between sentences, thumbnail lightly tapping the lower incisors and pen resting between finger and thumb” (56; 71), yet no actual writing is done on this desk.²⁸ The less Dov produces the more prolific Maya becomes. Apparently, Dov, the classic East European intellectual fails exactly where Maya, the forgotten girl who is only footnoted in the national narrative, succeeds. Dov’s failure to write embodies his sexual as well as national impotence. As Gilbert and Gubar noted, manhood and writing are closely related in patriarchal Western culture where: “The text’s author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen’s power, like his penis’s power, is not

²⁸ This is an almost exact replica of Gnessin’s protagonists in stories like “Hatzida” [Sideways], “Etzel” [Beside], and “Beterem” [The Time Before]. Gnessin, *Kol ketvei*.

just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim...the pen is truly mightier than its phallic counterpart the sword, and in patriarchy more resonantly sexual.”²⁹ Stripped of any gender, national or individual identity markers, Dov finally chooses to leave by joining the British army. Opting for the life of a soldier means that unlike Brenner’s characters, for example, who remain at the margins of the national narrative, Dov succumbs to the national demands of him as a man and sets out to restore his defected manliness.³⁰ In contrast to Maya’s journey, Dov chooses the well-paved main road of war (essentially what Frieda demanded of him as a “real” man) and thus quickly fades from the last chapters of the novel while Maya remains behind to rewrite their story.³¹

In a world where woman and land must be conquered, Maya rebels, declaring: “I don’t want to grow up into a woman” (73; 93).³² The tension between her sexual, national, and artistic identities reaches its heights in the novel when she falls in love with a new young instructor. The teacher—Yosef the sentry (*noter*) is described as the embodiment of the new Jewish man: “The warmth radiated from the fit, tanned body...this hedonistic body” (274; 363). Their first meeting takes place when he invites her to read with him Mapu’s *The Love of Zion* which was the first novel of

²⁹ Gilbert and Gubar 6.

³⁰ Yehudit Hendel’s (male) protagonist follows a different trajectory in the next chapter.

³¹ On war and manliness see also Mosse, *The Image of Man*; and Yael Feldman, “From Essentialism to Constructivism? The Gender of Peace and War in Gilman, Woolf, and Freud,” *Partial Answers* 2.1 (2004): 113-45.

³² Eytan precedes here what David Grossman depicts years later in *Sefer hadikduk hapnimi* [The Book of Intimate Grammar] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1991).

modern Hebrew literature. Ironically, the title of the novel suggests the only type of love Yosef can offer her. Lured by his apparent love of books, his healthy glow and mysterious activities at night, she decides to share her poetry with him expecting a gentle treatment. “Now she laid her sole treasure on the jeweler’s table. See how he focuses the light of the lamp, fits the magnifying glass in his shrewd, pitiless eye, takes the stones one by one in delicate tweezers, turns their sparkling faces this way and that, with pedantic patience. His fingertip will probe the flaws, will feed the roughness, and his nail will scratch the surface” (293; 389). However, instead of engaging with her work, he takes her to the roof where he and his friends plot against the British and begins kissing her. By inviting her into the secretive national space where none of the girls are allowed, he manages to negate her artistic aspirations, positioning his physical needs first—in the name of the national struggle. Later in the novel, Yosef disappears and once more replicates the role of the missing, irresponsible father which Maya knows all too well. Her expectations of him as a mentor are completely shattered when she is invited to visit him in town only to find out he had previous plans and leaves her alone with one of his many female admirers. Maya, who copied her poetry into a new notebook Yosef brought her, tears it apart in rage but almost immediately consoles herself:

Thus it was, until she reached the public lavatories. The cubicles were locked one after the other, only the last one was free. She collapsed inside and unwrapped the brown paper. Avidly, angrily, she began ripping out one by one the pages of the notebook, the lovely letters, so carefully rounded, the words that had intoxicated her as she copied them, crumpling them and throwing them one by one into the bowl.

And suddenly, only the thin cover was left in her hand. She peered, for the first time, into the bowl, full of the torn, mangled paper, and a silent calm took hold of her guts...It's a good thing I've got another copy' was her first thought, panting to stop herself choking. 'it's a good thing I've got a copy back at the hostel' (431).³³

Maya refuses to give up on her identity as a write. Under Bat Sheva's watchful eye she longs to stand out. When one of the girls asks the others to write short mementos in her scrapbook, they all rewrite a popular rhyme signing their name. "That's not the way to write, thinks Maya, the creative urge mounting in her. You need something different, something that's never been written before, something others can copy if they want" (122; 161). Maya does produce a new work of art by writing her own text, but Bat Sheva bluntly tramples this act of independence by copying Maya's text and putting her own name on it. Thus, she manages to both appropriate the text and reproduce it, erasing the original effect. But, as Walter Benjamin noted: "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be."³⁴ Maya learns to hide her writing yet pursues it with even more passion.

³³ Eytan's book anticipated Amalia Kanahna-Carmon's most well-known story, "Neima Sasson Writes Poetry," published one year later, which imprinted the narrative of the young woman as an artist persevering through the lack of support from her teacher and mentor in Hebrew literature. See Amalia Kahana-Carmon, *Bikhfifa ah'at* [Under one Roof: Short Stories] (Tel-Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1966) 136-151. For more on this story and the manner in which Kahana-Carmon inverts the traditional and genderized artist-muse relations see Feldman, *No Room* 63-64.

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Reproduction," *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968) 226. Although Benjamin referred to visual art I believe his comments are extremely relevant for other fields as well, including, in our case, writing.

REWRITING THE CANON

Rachel Eytan's own writing in the novel deserves a separate discussion here. *The Fifth Heaven*, as we saw in the beginning of this chapter, was enthusiastically received mostly due to its high-brow literary style. Eytan was compared with the foremost (male) Hebrew writers such as Brenner and Agnon (despite the profound differences between the two authors) and was praised for her “poetic prose”. Indeed, the text is intertextually complex and alludes to different sources, from biblical and midrashic ones to Russian and Hebrew literature, while also experimenting with different voices, styles, and jargons of speech according to the various characters. This writing can be said to exemplify Bakhtin's notion of polyphony where different, sometimes contradictory voices are represented in the text whether openly or in a hidden manner. While this element of Eytan's writing was often addressed in the reviews and essays on her book, the discussion remained within the realm of style ignoring the dimension of dialogism evident in her writing. Thus, issues of multiple and subversive themes were not treated by the critics and can be linked to the feminist reading of Bakhtin where: “What is crucial... is the idea that resistance can begin as private when women negotiate, manipulate and often subvert systems of domination they encounter.”³⁵ Furthermore, Eytan's appropriation of canonic (and therefore male and patriarchal) texts is repeated in the works of Schwartz and Kahana as we will soon see. However, while Eytan was praised for her mastery of language, the other two

³⁵ Dale M. Bauer and Susan Jaret McKinstry, introduction, *Feminism, Bakhtin* 3.

novelists were often reproached probably because their ideological and feminist agendas were less carefully obscured.

The novel ends with the slow disintegration of the institute, as most of the children and staff leave. Paradoxically, for Maya: “There came a delightful feeling of belonging, of identity, of mastery! Mistress of the place! And a strange and pleasing intoxication swept over her, the intoxication of awareness of the moment—the moment that is now, now, now, and will never return” (330; 441). It is not a coincidence, of course, that she finds solace in the midst of mayhem. As the institute—representing a paternal-national replacement of the nuclear family—collapses, she can finally flourish.³⁶ Just as on her arrival to the hostel, Maya resorts in the end to storytelling, this time true to her own models. Before she and another boy fall asleep she tells him the story about the queen and king:

‘The king was wise, strong and brave, and the queen was as beautiful as the sun and fair as the moon. One day the king went away to war. The queen sat and waited in the palace in her dress of gold and pearls, and the king didn’t return...’

Why not? His voice demanded, as from far away. Why didn’t he return...you’re always making up things like that...always spoiling the stories... (333: 444).

As Mary Rowes noted: “Fairy tales are not just entertaining fantasies, but powerful transmitters of romantic myths which encourage women to internalize only aspirations

³⁶ Eytan herself pointed out this connection in an interview where she stated: “This was an element that I was very interested in at the time. A situation where freedom and abandonment occur together with decay,” in Yoram Ronen, interview with Rachel Eytan, “Al nashim miflatzot vetzipiot meshihiot” [Monsters and Messianic Expectations], *Davar* 21 Febuary 1975.

deemed appropriate to our "real" sexual functions within a patriarchy."³⁷ By negating the passivity and dependency expected of women, Maya overrules conventional literary and gender patterns. In her story, prince charming disappears and he is no longer needed for the queen who can now weave her own narrative. The little girl who escaped the evil step-mother, was disillusioned by the prince and stood up to the wicked step-sister is now an independent story-teller. Unlike the heroines of the other novels in this chapter, Maya manages to rewrite the fairytale and with it possibly her own story as a young girl on the verge of national turmoil.³⁸

THE TAMING OF THE GODDESS: *Eve Gottlieb*

Miriam Schwartz's *Korot Hava Gottlieb* [Eve Gottlieb; 1968] presents a story of double marginalization.³⁹ Not only does it follow the coming-of-age tale of a young woman searching for a place for herself in the world, but also nearly half of the novel takes place within the strict orthodox community of Meah Shearim in 1940's Jerusalem. This is a segment of Israeli society which, until recently, has hardly been

³⁷ Mary Rowe, "Feminism and Fairy Tales," *Folk and Fairytales*, eds. Martin Hallett and Barbara Karasek (Canada: Broadview Press, 2002) 325-345. For more see: Adrienne Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," *Claims for Poetry*, ed. Donald Hall (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1982); Jennifer Waelti-Walters, *Fairy Tales and the Female Imagination* (Montreal: Eden, 1982); and Alicia Suskin Ostriker, *Stealing the Language: The Emergence of Women's Poetry in America* (Boston: Beacon, 1986).

³⁸ Again she precedes a similar move made by one of Hebrew literature's "founding mothers," Ruth Almog. For more on this see Feldman, *No Room* 204-211.

³⁹ Miriam Schwartz, *Korot Hava Gottlieb* [Eve Gottlieb] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1968).

depicted in modern Hebrew literature.⁴⁰ Thus, a female orthodox protagonist represents a special case within this study, especially when the novel equates religious and national narratives thus undermining the latter's claim for gender equality.⁴¹ As is the case with all three novels depicted in this chapter, Eve Gottlieb does not open with our heroine but unlike the other two it does open with another woman. This is Tami, a young girl from Tel Aviv who arrives at kibbutz Shevet Ahim mainly to be left out of her flirtatious mother's way and as a means to separate her from her beloved brother. Shortly after she arrives in the kibbutz she learns of the young woman —Eve Gottlieb—who stayed in her room only one year earlier. In a sense, Tami serves as the pale mirror image of Eve, a reminder of what her life might have looked like had she made different, perhaps more traditionally female choices. By choosing her as the “reader” of Eve Gottlieb's narrative, Schwartz opts to emphasize her heroine's powerful, yet tragic story without succumbing to a judgmental male gaze.

Miriam Schwarz was born in Jerusalem in 1936 where she studied Hebrew and English literature at the Hebrew University. She published her first poetry book in 1966, followed by her only novel *Korot Hava Gottlieb*. She has also published a book

⁴⁰ The past two decades have seen a surge in novels written by Jewish orthodox women like Chana Bat Shazar, Mira Magen and Yochi Brandes. For more on these see Barbara Landress, “Her Glory All Within: Rejecting and Transforming Orthodoxy in Israeli and American Jewish Women's Fiction,” diss., New York University, 2004.

⁴¹ This equality existed more in theory than in practice, as Yael Feldman established in her work *No Room*. For a sociological perspective see Dafna Izraeli, Ariella Friedman, and Ruth Schrift, eds., *Nashim bemilkud* [The Double Bind: The Status of Women in Israel] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1982); and Barbara Swirski and Marilyn P. Safir, eds., *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).

of midrashic interpretation *Vata'an Miriam* [And Miriam Answered; 1988], and almost twenty years later another poetry collection. Her work, however, has never been anthologized or given any critical attention other than a few reviews of her novel, an essay on the subject of Jerusalem in literature and a short mention in a comprehensive work on the image of the Arab in Hebrew Literature.⁴²

Like Rachel Eytan, Miriam Schwartz was commended for her mastery of the Hebrew language and the detailed, comprehensive overview of orthodox life in Jerusalem: “[This] debut novel...reveals a gifted writer who surprises with her thorough knowledge of realistic writing, the structuring of characters and her original style set apart by a personal seal.”⁴³ Many of the reviews depict her as a new promise on the horizon of Hebrew literature: “A serious writer who promises to contribute to Hebrew fiction.”⁴⁴ Yet, unlike Eytan, Schwartz was somewhat looked down upon by the critics because of the mystical, independent, and for some, oversexed woman she placed at the center of her novel. In contrast to Eytan’s Maya, Eve Gottlieb was viewed by the critics as “an unusual character who grew up and traveled an unusual

⁴² Yaffah Berlovitz, “Likro et yerushalim ketekst nashi” [Reading Jerusalem as a Feminine Text], *Ishah biyerushalayim: migdar, ḥ'evrah, vedat* [Woman in Jerusalem: Gender, Society and Religion], eds. Tova Cohen and Yehoshua Schwartz (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 2002) 181; Yochai Oppenheimer, *Me'ever lagader* [Barriers: The Representation of the Arab in Hebrew and Israeli Fiction, 1906-2005] (Tel Aviv: Sapir College/Am Oved, 2008).

⁴³ Adir Cohen, “Eve Gottlieb,” *Davar* 19 Aug. 1968.

⁴⁴ Y. Amos, “Sipur mugmar shel soferet math'ila” [A Polished Story of a Novice Writer], *Hatzofe* 23 Aug. 1968.

world,”⁴⁵ a woman “in whom several feminine traits have been overemphasized so as to make her an archetype.”⁴⁶

As long as Schwartz remained in the realm of the orthodox Jewish community in Jerusalem she was praised by the critics, but her heroine’s journeys to Tel Aviv, and more so to the kibbutz, were harshly critiqued: “Just as Miriam Schwartz’s Jerusalem is strong in its landscape and the manner of its inhabitants, so does Tel Aviv pale with its ...young studs searching for cheap pleasures,” while “Miriam Schwartz’s kibbutz...is so unnatural, so improbable that the ending of the book overshadows its opening and deprives the writer of the credit we awarded her at first.”⁴⁷ Thus, as long as Schwartz focused on the “exotic” unknown mysteries of Meah Shearim she was praised for her “authentic” depiction, but when the heroine ventured into the more familiar territories of Israeli society the novel became “flat” and “stereotypical”.⁴⁸

Unlike Eytan, Schwartz was often reproached for alluding to other (male, canonic) writers of Hebrew literature. “She has a feminine talent of absorbing different inspirations: Fireberg...Berdichevski...Amos Oz...Benjamin Tammuz, the quilt

⁴⁵ Yitzhak Levi Hayerushalmi, “Olam muzar beKorot Hava Gottlieb” [A Strange World in Eve Gottlieb], *Maariv* 19 July 1968. Considering the similarities between Eve’s story and the *talush* character, which will become apparent next, , the main difference seems to be their gender.

⁴⁶ Haim Shoham, “Miriam Schwartz’s Eve Gottlieb,” *Haaretz* 19 July 1968.

⁴⁷ Z. Shem, “From Meah Shearim to Shevet Aḥim,” *Shdemot* (Fall 1968): 139. Schwartz was not alone here. Many literary critiques of the kibbutz were rejected by critics up until the late 1960s. For various examples see Reuven Kritz and Uri Kritz, *Sipurei hakibbutz* [The Stories of the Kibbutz], (Tel Aviv: Pura Books, 1997).

⁴⁸ This critique brings to mind the case of Dvora Baron who was quickly labeled by critics as a writer of the old Jewish East European town completely ignoring the feminist aspects of her work, see note 16 Chapter 2.

hybrid of styles and influences lacks a center. All this absorption presents no talent.”⁴⁹

While Eytan published in the beginning of the 1960s, Schwartz’s book appears in 1968 well after the first attempts of Yehoshua and Oz to appropriate Agnon as their linguistic model for surrealist content (see Chapter 1). In Schwartz’s case, however, she manipulates the original biblical and midrashic texts rather than their interpretations by Israeli writers, a fact missed by most of her reviewers. Thus, her rich textual references were no longer a novelty but this wasn’t the only reason.

Apparently, in Schwartz’s case, her high-brow writing style marked her allusions to other works in Hebrew literature as degrading because it was used to depict a somewhat sensational heroine who, as we shall see next, defied traditional gender restriction.

PARADISE LOST

Eve Gottlieb was born alongside her twin brother Nehemia after seven years of barrenness. While still small babies, their grandmother notices that “Nehemia was born under the symbol of water while Eve is all fire” (34).⁵⁰ Even as a little girl Eve is already considered dangerously beautiful with her flaming-red hair and her sense of adventure which often gets the two children in trouble. Childhood’s short period of

⁴⁹ Yona Bachur, “A Meah Shearim Cocktail,” *Al Hamishmar* 26 Aug. 1968. This critique is particularly interesting in light of the fact that the younger, leading writers of the time like Oz or Yehoshua were clearly influenced by Agnon, Brenner and Berdichevski and were often commended for it by the critics.

⁵⁰ All translations from the novel hereafter are mine.

paradise quickly ends when Eve first learns of her female inferiority as her brother enters the *heder*—the traditional schooling system of orthodox Jews. In a touching scene Schwartz describes how the little girl refuses the forced separation and loudly bangs on the *heder*'s windows until the Rabbi is forced to notice her.⁵¹ When he does however, he does not release her brother, or invite her in, but rather instructs her that her duty is: “To give up what is seemingly yours for God” (49). For Eve this formative moment signals the beginning of the fall from paradise and the realization that she is now expelled from the male domain to which she has no claim. This is a devastating discovery but also an empowering one. In her now lonely expeditions around the city, Eve learns about her own internal power. Thus, when she notices a wounded stork, unable to fly, she is struck by their resemblance: "In that mute encounter which seemed out of the bounds of time Eve first found herself on the brink of an open abyss between two souls. When faced, suddenly, with her new, exclusive, loneliness, the loneliness of another being, so close and yet so hopelessly far, it was then that she felt an unknown force swelling within her and growing strong" (50).

Feminine role models around her are, of course, traditional and although her father lets her listen in on his educational sessions with his son, her mother enlists her to do the housework. The mother both envies and fears Eve, telling herself: “You have waited for seven long years so that a little girl will rob you of your only son, the most

⁵¹ The metaphor here is not coincidental, of course, given the protagonist's name which will be further discussed.

wise and handsome of all” (38).⁵² She sees her daughter as an obstacle in raising her true creation—her son. Eve’s adventurous, and later sexual presence, not only contaminates her brother’s divine position in the house, but also threatens her mother’s (patriarchal) role as the head of the household by suggesting an alternative female model, one which fails to find support throughout the novel.⁵³

The meaning of the protagonist’s name—Eve—plays a key role in understanding her character in the novel. In fact, the biblical Eve already encompasses in her name all the contradictory characterizations of the young girl. On the one hand she is the first mother, the “mother of all living”, a powerful and positive figure, but on the other hand she is the original sinner, the one who seduced Adam and led to their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. “Her story is thus seen as a parable of the moral weakness and the strong proclivity for evil that characterize the female of the human species.”⁵⁴ In midrashic literature Eve is depicted as closely associated with Satan since “as soon as Eve was created, Satan was created with her.”⁵⁵ In Schwartz’s novel this contradiction is further emphasized when we add her last name Gottlieb—one who loves God—in Yiddish. As we shall see, Eve rewrites the Genesis story by

⁵² Seven is of course a meaningful number in the Hebrew bible—Jacob waited for Rachel for seven years, Pharaoh experienced seven good and seven bad years, etc. Thus, Eve’s birth is further loaded with religious symbolism.

⁵³ For more on this, especially in the literary context, see Hannah Naveh, “Lev habayit lev ha’or” [Heart of the House, Heart of Light], *Al ahavat em umora av* [The Love of Mothers and the Fear of Fathers Rethinking the Israeli Family], ed. Aviad Kleinberg (Jerusalem: Keter, 2004) 105-177.

⁵⁴ Nehama Aschkenasi, *Eve’s Journey: Feminine Images in Hebraic Literary Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1986) 39.

⁵⁵ Midrash rabbah 17:9.

choosing death over the decree of patriarchy where: “In sorrow you will bring forth sons, and to your husband your longing shall be, and he will rule over you.”⁵⁶ Thus, Eve’s initial portrayal as the familiar Janus-faced image of the female angel/monster is subtly undermined throughout the narrative, especially when she turns to art as her creative outlet.⁵⁷

Although the first half of the book takes place within the confining walls of the old city of Jerusalem, the national turmoil around it manages to penetrate more than once, determining some of the most significant events in the plot. After her beloved brother is “exiled” to the closed male sphere of orthodox education:

Eve felt as though Nehemia was trapped in a glass cell. She sees him, hears his voice, but cannot touch him. Rage ignites in her a powerful drive to break the glass even if it would hurt them both... Suddenly the hatred of revenge flared within her, it was a burning and painful emotion, which in its bitterness and sweetness seemed like love (61).

Eve’s frustration and jealousy of her brother evoke another biblical story. When she finally manages to drag Nehemia outside the city walls to play hide and seek, he is killed during a shootout between a young Arab and a British officer chasing him. Although, unlike Cain, she did not physically kill her brother, just like Cain, her envy underscores her relationship with Nehemia, and thus she feels guilty of her indirect involvement in the killing. Nehemia’s death is also the first time that the national discourse overshadows the orthodox-personal one, forcefully penetrating her life. As Yaffah Berlovitz notes, “The Jerusalem seam crosses the times between pre-state and

⁵⁶ Genesis 3:16.

⁵⁷ See elaborate discussion in Gilbert and Gubar 17-31.

state in the lives of the small community of 'Meah Shearim.' Even when this community rejects, according to its beliefs, historical time, longing to hold on only to divine time outside of history, and more specifically outside of the Zionist historical narrative; it cannot deny its [political] events and especially the War of Independence and its fateful implications for the community and for the heroine."⁵⁸ As the personal and national accounts become entangled in the novel, Eve learns that she, as a woman, is denied representation in both the traditional and modern patriarchal narrative. At the same time, Schwartz integrates some of the major texts of these very narratives into her novel, (mis)reading them to portray her heroine's intricate life.⁵⁹

Much like Rachel Eytan, Miriam Schwartz clearly chose to incorporate traditional male-canonic texts in her writing in order to portray the story of a woman with no voice. She even includes an entire sermon by a local Rabbi who warns his audience, in biblical Hebrew as well as Yiddish idioms, not to drift away from their God, anticipating Eve's future where, "the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth. Like the night is the evil inclination and like the sun setting and rising is the good inclination... a man who strays away from his blessed God is like those who turn their back to the light" (102).⁶⁰ According to Tova Cohen, the appropriation of male

⁵⁸ Yaffah Berlovitz, "Likro et yerushalim" 181.

⁵⁹ Here she follows Harold Bloom's model of the "strong poets" who enter poetic history: "By misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves," Bloom 5.

⁶⁰ This scene reads as homage to a similar chapter in Sh. Y. Agnon's *Tmol shilshom* [Yesteryear] (Berlin: Schocken, 1945). I thank Yael Feldman for pointing out this resemblance.

canonic texts by women authors occurs for two reasons: either the women are out to protest and demonstrate their intellectual-literary ambitions, or they strive to carve a place for themselves within the father's language using it as a tool of female expression.⁶¹ Eve Gottlieb goes a step further. By appropriating biblical and midrashic texts, as well as alluding to some classics of modern Hebrew literature (Fireberg, Agnon), Schwartz not only proves her capabilities nor does she settle for awarding her heroine a strong speaking voice; she also uses these texts as a means to criticize, undermine and subvert religious, ideological and national discourses, exposing their underlying patriarchal rules which seek to both metaphorize women and control their concrete bodies as Eve complains in the novel: "This nation is a nation of masters, its religion the religion of men. They have taken hold of all the commandments and they will be rewarded in the next world" (135). Nevertheless, the novel's title in Hebrew "Korot Hava Gottlieb" [The Account of Eve Gottlieb] clearly declares itself to be a competing story to the patriarchal tale, much like the ending of Eytan's *The Fifth Heaven*.⁶² Batya Kahana's novel, unlike the other two, will present a different route, suggesting a so-called feminine genre. These different writing styles will be further discussed toward the end of the chapter where the critics' reception will be examined in relation to women writers.

⁶¹ Cohen, "Betokh hatarbut."

⁶² The word *korot* originates in the Bible, but in modern usage it often indicates official (read male) historical accounts.

BREAKING BOUNDARIES

Nehemia's death denies Eve her last rights as a family member. Her mother completely shuns the young girl while her father decides to send his daughter to a school for girls, outside the orthodox neighborhood, as a sacrifice for his God. His reasoning is that she will need to learn the ways of the enemy—meaning those secular Jews surrounding them:

'Didn't Dvora and Yael save their people?...even if, God forbid, she will stray from her ways, she is but a female and her loss will not be great...in heaven they will probably lighten her sentence since everyone knows that all women are temperamentally light-headed'...and Aharon Gottlieb dared to hope that on account of his daughter Eve the entire community will benefit" (72).

Interestingly, once the daughter's threatening sexuality is removed from the house, the mother becomes fertile again and Eve is surrounded with new siblings she is not allowed to approach.⁶³

At her school, Eve experiences several new revelations. In a sense, the new life reproduces her previous one through the students' internal hierarchies and through the mantra of the school which works to: "Uproot at a young age any illusions of equality and fraternity" (81). But this new environment also allows her to venture into unexplored territories including her own emerging sexuality. The girls fondle one another, touch and caress, and Eve, who longs for a human touch, thrives on it.

Although she is immediately adopted by one of the older girls she soon discovers that:

⁶³ Perhaps somewhat reminiscent of Lilith who is depicted in Jewish lore as harming babies, particularly male, after refusing to assume the subordinate role of wife to Adam before the creation of Eve.

“Beyond the friendly smiling face and the fondness of the caressing hands she felt their indifference like the hard floor under a mat. A craving for seclusion would suddenly take over her” (76). Like Maya in *The Fifth Heaven*, Eve quickly learns to embrace this loneliness as her studies open an entire new world of books and reading: “She was probably most intoxicated by the reading, where new, endless horizons were revealed. Then she would return to father’s house with its high walls, its memories. Thus, unknowingly, she was torn between two authorities and a still wall with no window or opening between them” (90).

At the house of her best friend Aviva, Eve is also exposed to art and new forms of beauty, especially that of the human body: “And from the walls of her strict Judaism she would envy this straightforward admiration of the glory of the human body” (95). Paradoxically, Aviva’s father is a veterinarian while Eve's father is the local *shohet* (slaughterer). This distinction metaphorically portrays the difference between the two worlds, between the taking and giving of life, between the suffocating walls and the new open horizons of art and literature. Thus, the rift between the two components of Eve's life deepens until she is forced to choose her vocation. This choice is once again dictated by the subdued national narrative. Eve’s father is killed in one of the bombings during the War of Independence and her last link to the old world is cut off. With the establishment of the state of Israel she moves to another neighborhood outside the walls of the old city.

STRUGGLING WITH THE NATIONAL DEMON

Consequently, as Eve turns away from her family, her mother remarries and the new husband suggests “selling” the beautiful girl to the highest bidder, so does the national discourse begin to replace the religious one, and like the other novels discussed here, it also relates directly to Eve’s own emerging sexuality. While working for a local seamstress Eve sees Mahmud, an Arab boy she had once briefly met in the Old City. The two recognize each other and immediately bond. Mahmud takes her to meet his family where, on the one hand, she is treated with admiration and respect, and on the other, she is feared for her dangerous beauty and given a necklace usually intended for female horses as a protection from the devil. Her meeting with Mahmud also triggers the setting free of her oppressed sexuality. In a dark and passionate scene Schwartz depicts their encounter as a fake chase: “Seemingly a scared deer with her hunters close by, turning to fight for her life. But the night seemed to wait for her to quiet down, royally wrapping her with its splendor” (162). This description presents interesting contradictions: Eve is portrayed as an animal being chased but only seemingly so, while in fact she feels adored by the night and by the suitor behind her. She “waits for Mahmud to do with her as he pleases” (162), but in essence she is the one who directs this scene misleading him with her passive stand.⁶⁴ It is almost as though she is staging her surrender for his sake while being

⁶⁴ In a different scene where Eve is sexually harassed by a stranger she clearly objects and runs away.

completely aware of what is about to happen. Thus, she pursues their sexual encounter by performing a stereotypical female role which she plays to her advantage.

Mahmud's character merits a short pause in our reading of the novel. Arab characters, as the ultimate Other of Jewish-Zionist identity, have existed in Hebrew literature since its early days. Though pre-1948 their image was often the one of the noble savage, after the establishment of the state Arab characters were captured in a myriad of ways.⁶⁵ Yochai Oppenheimer argues that Hebrew literature has always and still does grapple with an Orientalist meta-narrative in which the Arab remains the Other whether he is adored, feared, or both.⁶⁶ Thus, the representation of the Arab in Hebrew and Israeli literature moved from the proud Bedouin, to the depiction of the Arab as victim in *Yizhar* in the 1950s, to the mute "imagined" Arab of A.B. Yehoshua's "Mul haya'arot" [Facing the Forests], or the more sexually threatening one in Amos Oz's first stories. These images have either employed or resisted the orientalist gaze which aimed at: "Dominating, restructuring and having authority over the Orient."⁶⁷ While the topic of Jewish-Arab love-affairs began surfacing in the 1960s, different writers produced a different interpretation of these relationships.⁶⁸ In

⁶⁵ For other depictions pre-1948, see Gila Ramras-Rauch, *The Arab in Israeli Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

⁶⁶ Oppenheimer, *Me'ever lagader*.

⁶⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978) 3. For more on Said's theory, see the discussion of Batya Kahana's novel next.

⁶⁸ Most notably in Hemda Alon's novel, *Zar lo yavo* [No Trespassing] (Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1962), in which a Jewish woman and a young intellectual Arab fall in love. On the one hand, Alon tried to create an "inverted" Arab who is more Jewish than the other Jews, but on the other hand, she still maintained Israeli stereotypes of

Eve Gottlieb, unlike some of the other works in that period, Mahmud is a real man, with a family, with history and ambitions. But while Oppenheimer sees the relationship between Eve and Mahmud as related only to the masculine national narrative, where “the Arab appears as the one who steals the Israeli woman’s love from the [Jewish] man, from the family and first and foremost from the nation,” his depiction allows only for the national level to be read in the relationship. As I will show in my reading, although Mahmud is often referred to as a “demon,” his sexual violence towards Eve also relates to his efforts to subjugate her as an independent woman (and artist) as all the other men in the novel do. Thus, Mahmud's national anti-Zionist narrative in the novel is just one of many patriarchal paradigms that Eve tries to escape.

Many of *Eve Gottlieb*'s reviewers lingered over the question of Mahmud and why the young writer chose an Arab lover for her formerly orthodox heroine. Often the conclusion was that it was an extreme answer to the constraints of orthodox upbringing and perhaps a need to create some sensation in a debut novel: “Her love for an educated, communist Arab serves as a punishment from above...as the Arab takes advantage of the Jewish woman’s innocence,”⁶⁹ wrote one critic, while another suggested that “with Mahmud the wild, demonic aspects of Eve’s soul are satisfied.

the Arab as primitive and dirty. The relationship here, as in other novels, fails. For more see Oppenheimer 215-219.

⁶⁹ Amos 1968.

Since she sinned...the sin needed to be a 'total' one."⁷⁰ Yet these reviews all ignore issues of gender and nation explored in the novel.

Inevitably, the relationship with Mahmud highlights the national dimension in Eve's story. He is a communist, an Arab student whose beloved cousin is forbidden by the Zionists to enter the state. Mahmud blurs the boundaries between his political and romantic enemies and attacks Eve when he sees her talking to another man: "All these Zionists need to be castrated" (168). Once more, Eve is torn between two worlds. On the one hand she feels guilty of what her people did to Mahmud's family, while on the other hand she sees herself as a traitor who makes deals with the enemy. Ever since Eve has moved out of the old city, she hallucinates meeting the devil (in Hebrew: *satan*) in the image of a man-goat. Earlier in the novel her grandmother tells her stories about her dying grandfather's struggle with the devil, but while her grandfather is depicted as Job she is granted the role of the devil's servant by her family. For her it is Mahmud who embodies evil, as his political ambitions become infused with the sexual ones:

Every night, as though in a dream, the devil is revealed to her in the image of the beloved stranger. Her skin longed for the brown and salty skin of the devil, the white devil teeth and lips hurting and healing her mouth, cheeks, neck, her entire body down to her toes. The black eyes of the devil are soft in their plea like an old song about a lost homeland and hard in their victory like the blade of a sword⁷¹ It is the devil who comes to her like a bead of light coming to the water breaking into shreds of gold (165).

⁷⁰ Esther Streit-Wortzel, "Eve Gottlieb," *Dvar Hapoelet* Nov. 1968.

⁷¹ In the Hebrew she uses the Arabic word *shabaria*, a short, curved knife.

He is her lover, but also longs for his lost land aiming to conquer her as his territory, physically realizing the metaphor of woman as land: “Since he robbed her of her privacy and turned her into an idea she struggled with him...it seemed to her that she was betraying her country, her people, her father who was killed by the Arabs, betraying the legacy of modesty and purity he bequeathed her” (169).⁷² Although she feels torn between her father and lover, in reality the first “sacrificed” her in the name of the larger cause, while the other treats her as a revengeful conquest in the name of his people. Thus, while the choice of an Arab lover represents the attempt to write herself outside the narratives molding her life—the religious and the national one, and although Mahmud comes from the margins of the world Eve Gottlieb belongs to, he too presents her with a dominant-patriarchal mold where man rules and woman is dominated. Unable to find her voice in any of these models, Eve turns to painting as an alternative form of expression.

Underscored by national and sexual conflicts, Eve and Mahmud’s tremulous relationship also signifies her first days as an artist. She begins drawing her

⁷² Ironically the association of woman and land was also one of the key images characterizing the Zionist movement, as discussed earlier. For more on these images see Gideon Ofrat, *Adama, adam dam* [Earth, Man, Blood: The Myth of the Pioneer and the Ritual of Earth in Eretz-Israel Settlement Drama] (Tel Aviv: Chrikover, 1980); Hannan Hever, “Shirat haguf hal’eumi: nashim meshorerot bemilḥemet hashihzur” [The Poetry of the National Body: Women Poets During the War of Independence], *Te’orya ubikoret* 7 (Winter 1995): 99-123; and Hamutal Tsamir, “Hakorban haḥalutzi, ha’aretz hakdosha vehofa’ata shel shirat hanashim beshnot ha’esrim” [The Pioneer Sacrifice, the Holy Land and the Appearance of Women’s Poetry in the 1920s], *Rega shel huledet* [A Moment of Birth: Studies in Hebrew and Yiddish Literature in Honor of Dan Miron], ed. Hannan Hever (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2007) 645-673.

hallucinations and dreams and most of her paintings include such images as storms, fires, and wild animals— most dominantly raging bulls: “Out of the stormy sky jumps a giant, black bull. The entire painting is full of it. His eyes red with fire... his horns threaten the tiny houses [beneath]” (175). The image of the bull is particularly important since it symbolizes both male fertility and a divine element. The bull was a widespread symbol of the gods in the ancient Near East, and in Greek mythology, representing both strength and virility, although it also relates to a false God in the Hebrew bible.⁷³ Like the other heroines depicted in this chapter, Eve’s art is not simply a diversion but her only form of expression, the only narrative she is allowed. Although she is desired as a model for other painters throughout the novel, she is not interested in their image of her. As Gilbert and Gubar put it: “Precisely because a woman is denied the autonomy—the subjectivity—that the pen represents, she is not only excluded from culture...but she also becomes herself an embodiment of just those extremes of mysterious and intransigent Otherness which culture confronts with worship or fear, love or loathing.”⁷⁴ In other words, Eve Gottlieb represents the story of all the Eves that follow the biblical one, they become an emblem rather than concrete specific beings, they are worshiped but confined so that their own drives and desires will not break free.⁷⁵ Yet, in this novel, Eve’s struggle is often silenced by the

⁷³ Genesis 49. In Greek mythology Zeus was disguised as a bull when he planned to kidnap Europa from her father’s house and then marry her.

⁷⁴ Gilbert and Gubar 19.

⁷⁵ For examples of threatening female characters in the writings of male authors from Sh. Y. Agnon to A. B. Yehoshua, see Aschkenasy, *Eve’s Journey* 62-76. Aschkenasy

other, more dominant, narratives, as she continues her journey from the holy city to the heart of national identity in the kibbutz.

THE BIRTH AND DEATH OF THE GODDESS

Ironically, when Eve finally gives up the struggle with Mahmud, settling down to be a diligent “wife” to her lover, she finds out she is pregnant and decides once again to move, this time leaving Jerusalem for Tel Aviv: “Where one can lose oneself within the crowds as they provide freedom, the freedom of those hidden from themselves” (179). There she is adopted by Nitza, a flirtatious girl she works with at a clothing shop. But even in Tel Aviv with its bohemian, liberal, hedonistic life of cafés, parties, and flirtations she finds she threatens those around her by defying their stereotypical feminine model of seducer. Just like her father and Mahmud, the artists and writers she meets want to tame her and contain her disturbing beauty and independence. Even the world of art she so longs for is revealed to be male-dominated as she is only allowed to participate as a model. Thus, when a local painter wishes to draw Eve’s naked body she resents his need to put her on a pedestal and worship her beauty from afar. Although she too sees herself as a goddess, her image is one of power and passion rather than a beautiful object. In fact, in one of the most powerful scenes in the novel Eve lapses, during a dance at a party, into a vivid hallucination. In

concludes that these writers “portray woman as the force that strives to bring man and civilization back to primordial chaos...[identifying] the feminine as the irrational and the disintegrator of the male consciousness” (73).

it she sees herself as a goddess-lioness worshiped by all: “Each hunter approached and kissed the cape of the goddess. Sometimes one of them would suddenly toss his dog as a prey for the lioness...then she would put her paw on his neck and her cape will spread over him like a canopy” (201). In her mind, she is a mother to all creatures, the only one who can conquer the raging bull who appears before her. But this utopia of female empowerment is soon shattered as Eve wakes up to find out that due to her pregnancy she cannot stay for long. Nitza arranges for her to move to a kibbutz and work there, and after refusing a marriage proposal from Gidi, one of her young admirers, Eve sets out on her way to her last stop, kibbutz Shevet Ahim.

Like *The Fifth Heaven*, Shevet Ahim [literally: brothers living together in unity] turns out to be an ironic title of the place where Eve fails to find brotherly love, but does finally find solitary peace. At the kibbutz she elicits intrigue and respect but also ignites passion among the kibbutz men even when she is fully pregnant. Eve is courted by several men: Yasha, the kibbutz treasurer who first treats her with suspicion but is ultimately conquered by her willingness to work and her beauty; Shlomo, a young Holocaust survivor who adores Eve like a queen and longs to serve her; and Naor the *sabra* who treats her aggressively and is offended by her indifference to him. All of them represent stereotypical kibbutz figures, as they were captured in Hebrew literature, in the years following the establishment of Israel.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ These images were captured by writers of the *Palmach* as well as State generation. Some famous examples are Moshe Shamir’s *Hu halakh basadot* [He Walked in the

Interestingly, it is in the kibbutz that Eve finally finds some peace, mostly due to her newly found connection with the land: “She felt at home with these people whose words she would ridicule in her heart and whose deeds she respected, more than belonging to them, however, she belonged to this black, fertile land around her” (225). This symbiosis with the earth presents an interesting interpretation of the land’s position in both Judaism and Zionism where the sacred land must be redeemed. Eve Gottlieb appropriates these meanings and turns them upside down by claiming the land for herself, thus constructing a personal-feminine story with the national-religious building blocks. She feminizes the land as “the earth was warm and rough under her heavy body, and the pine needles that fell down and browned were tickling-stabbing her bare legs and naked arms, and she felt their touch even underneath her clothes...she was lying down, half awake, the hidden, quiet, expectation inside her and her body completely serene in its rest” (219). Thus, while she eroticizes the encounter with the land, as was common in the national narrative, she is a woman and as such changes the traditional balance of power. Unlike the new Jewish man who conquers the land, Eve sees herself as part of it, since they are both “eternal and strong, beyond harm” (244). Eve longs to merge with the land and the rest it offers her already holds the promise of death.⁷⁷ In *Beshem hanof* [In the Name of the Land] Hamutal Tsamir

Fields, 1947] and Amos Oz’s first stories in *Artzot hatan* [Where the Jackals Howl, 1966].

⁷⁷ This association was particularly apparent in the early works of Amos Oz and A.B. Yehoshua, but where their protagonists were weak and marginal and were threatened by the landscape (in Yehoshua’s “Mul haye’arot” [Facing the Forests] or Oz’s “Artzot

presents a similar case with the women poets of the state generation.⁷⁸ There, poets like Esther Raab (who was "rediscovered" and appropriated by Nathan Zach and the *likrat* group) depict a complex, erotic relationship with the land, overturning the male nationalist model of depicting the land as female. While Eve Gottlieb relates to and identifies with mother earth, her death will nevertheless contaminate the sacredness of the nationalized land. This is a personal, private death, one which is not poeticized or documented, the death of a woman who writes herself outside the ruling narratives of her religion and country.⁷⁹

Life in the kibbutz turns out to replicate the narratives Eve has previously experienced. She herself declares it reminds her of Meah Shearim. Thus, Schwartz subverts Zionist claims for the creation of the new Jew and its efforts to separate it from the old Jewish world. For Schwartz's heroine it is the patriarchal discourse that

hatan" [Nomads and Viper]), Schwartz empowers her heroine through the erotic (positive) touch of the land which reflects on her own strength. Death is also implied when the local (German) doctor begs her to listen to Gustav Mahler's Song of the Earth where the first parts of the musical piece, which depict beauty and youth, are followed by the tumult of galloping horses and the final segment of farewell and death. For more on this association see Hazelton, *Israeli women*; ; Ofrat, *Adama adam*; Gertz *Hirbet h'iz'a*; and Yaffah Berlovitch *Lehamtzi erez lehamtzi am* [Inventing a Land, Inventing a People] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1996).

⁷⁸ Hamutal Tsamir, *Beshem hanof*.

⁷⁹ For some different examples of the anthemized and appropriated dead bodies see Hannah Naveh, *Beshevi ha'evel* [Captives of Mourning] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1993) 147; Hever, "Shirat haguf hal'eumi"; Gluzman "Ha'estetika shel haguf"; and Feldman, "Mi'mot qedoshim' le 'osher aqedah,' o 'hamtz'at' ha'aqedah kefigura heroit basiah hatzioni" [From the Death of Saints to the Happiness of Akkedah or the Invention of the Akkedah as a Heroic Figure in the Zionist Discourse], *Israel* 12 (2007) 107-151.

underlines and determines both worlds. When Eve is considered for kibbutz membership, and the identity of her future baby's father is revealed, the kibbutz is torn apart. Just as her orthodox family rejected her in the past, so does the secular, communal Shevet Ahim. Her friends and admirers claim they need to protect her and even find the suitable national ideals to support their argument: "As the most progressive element within Israeli society we need to accept with open arms those who may be persecuted by the prejudice" (249). Others, like Naor, argue that she will pose a security threat to the kibbutz, exposing once more how, as Deniz Kandiyoti puts it: "Women are relegated to the margins of the polity even though their centrality to the nation is constantly being reaffirmed. It is reaffirmed consciously in nationalist rhetoric where the nation itself is represented as a woman to be protected or, less consciously, in an intense preoccupation with women's appropriate sexual conduct. The latter often constitutes the crucial distinction between the nation and its 'others'."⁸⁰ Just as she was feared and envied by her mother, by Mahmud and by her Tel Aviv acquaintances, once more Eve is depicted by the kibbutz as a red witch who has hypnotized its men.⁸¹ Even Yasha feels she put a spell on him: "Damn those

⁸⁰ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Identity and its Discontents: Women and the Nation," *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) 377.

⁸¹ At one point in the novel she is also called a red cow which brings up an interesting connotation. In Jewish tradition the red cow is a heifer that is sacrificed and whose ashes are used for the ritual purification of people who came into contact with a corpse. In that case Eve is supposed to be sacrificed to redeem those who have sinned but although she dies, her death fails to vindicate them. It might also allude to Berdichevski's well-known story by the same name.

witches. You never know what is true and what false. The other women certainly don't hate them for nothing, they know their kind" (254). When she learns of their rejection, during Yom Kippur, she is peaceful, unresponsive.⁸² Once more she experiences a hallucinatory dream in which she dies and goes to heaven, where she finds her entire family. As she tries to make sense of her surrounding her father, grandfather, and Nehemia each block her mouth, eyes and ears calling: "I am one and my name is one.' She didn't know who spoke since the voice was father's and Nehemia's and grandmother's, and Mahmud's voice too was clearly heard. She bit the hand over her mouth trying to remove it" (257). This quote is a variation on Zachariah's prophecy depicting God's triumph over the enemies of Israel and how on redemption day only God, who is one, will rule the world. Thus, Eve is fighting this divine-male linkage that aims to suffocate her whether she is on earth or in heaven. Waking up from her dream Eve realizes her future child will never be accepted within Israeli society since he or she will not fit any of the narratives which shape its identity: the orthodox, the national, and even the Arab-communist one, all underscored by patriarchy. She leaves the kibbutz and in a powerful scene, tormented by labor pains, she is crushed between the kibbutz truck and Gidi's car as he comes to repeat his marriage proposal. Thus, her death becomes symbolic of the life that found no place in between religious decrees and socialist ideals. After she is killed one of the girls sarcastically remarks: "She beat you, the red witch managed to stay here after all"

⁸² There is of course some blunt symbolism here: although she fasts and repents for her sins, she is not forgiven by the paternal God of her childhood.

(262). Yet, Eve manages more than that. In her suicidal death she refuses to adopt the female categories allotted to her. She does not become a mother or a wife but chooses to merge with the land in an ironic move which mocks the national model of working the land and dying for it. As a woman, she sacrifices her life, not in the name of national unity, but because of its absence. Land and woman, metaphorically identical in the national imagination, are here bound together in a connection of death.⁸³ In denying the patriarchal (whether national or religious) policing of her body, the story of the original Eve is also being rewritten by her namesake. Rather than being banished, once again, from paradise, Eve Gottlieb empties the competing male narratives around her of their meaning by refusing to become represented by them and by dictating, if not her life, then her death.

"PASSING THE LOVE OF WOMEN,"⁸⁴ HOMOEROTICS AND THE NATION: *The Arrows Are Beyond Thee*

Batya Kahana's novel, *Haḥitzim mimkha vahal'ah* [The Arrows Are Beyond Thee] published in 1960, presents a subversive take on the melodramatic novel.⁸⁵ *The Arrows* follows the story of Gina, a beautiful, rich and bored housewife in 1940s Tel Aviv. Like Eytan's novel, *The Arrows* opens with a man, Gina's son Zvika, a typical *sabra*

⁸³ The double identity of the land as a womb and a grave is already evident in the bible of course, Genesis 3:19: "By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

⁸⁴ This quote is taken from David's lament of Jonathan in II Samuel 1:26.

⁸⁵ Batya Kahana, *Haḥitzim mimkha vahal'ah* [The Arrows are Beyond Thee] (Ramat Gan: Massadah, 1960).

who shows up, “covered with dust” (5), during the Sinai campaign at the home of his mother’s old friend Batya, where he finds his late mother’s diary.⁸⁶ Once Zvika begins reading the diary the story switches to Gina. In 1930s Vienna, Gina married an older man and immigrated with him to Palestine. While Moshe, the new husband, is barely described in the diary, Batya, a young woman Gina meets on a boat trip—immediately becomes its main protagonist. Batya, “a sabra, a kibbutz girl...an idealist” (32), is everything that Gina isn’t.⁸⁷ Although on the surface it seems that they share little in common, their relationship quickly adopts the model of a couple and becomes a crucial aspect of Gina’s life. *The Arrows* follows the story of the two women who struggle with their different national and gender positioning: Gina as a mother and Batya as an underground member. For both women, the result of their attempts to defy gender and national norms of their time, and particularly their own intimate relationship, leads to tragic results.

Batya Kahana (1901-1979) was born in Ukraine and immigrated to Palestine in 1921. She attended university in Russia and Vienna and began writing and publishing in Russian. Her first story was published in 1922 and her first novel *Bifroah etz hehadar* [When the Orange Grove First Blooms; 1931] was published in several parts by poet Moshe Shlonsky in *Haaretz*. Kahana published three more short-stories collections, the last one in 1967. Besides an excerpt from her second novel, *The*

⁸⁶ All translations from the novel hereafter are mine.

⁸⁷ There is, of course, an interesting autobiographical reference here, since Kahana uses her own name for this character.

Arrows are Beyond Thee in Yaffah Berlovitz's 2003 anthology, and an essay Berlovitz wrote on her two novels, *Kahana*, like Schwartz, never received scholarly attention and she is not included in the central historiographies of Hebrew literature.⁸⁸

Unlike Eytan and Schwartz, *Kahana*'s novel received little attention and even less critical praise even when it first came out. The few short reviews available define the novel as sensational and "sewn together in coarse seams."⁸⁹ The characters are mostly described as flat and lacking in authenticity, and while the critics admit that "to the book's credit it can be said that it reads with certain suspense," the writer is reprimanded since "she cannot restrain her flowing emotions."⁹⁰ As one of the critics summarized: "There is a certain kind of literature that we treat with some forgiveness. I mean the transitional literature...between the true, aesthetically valuable literature and cheap detective stories...we do not demand a whole lot from this literature, we do not demand an artistic-spiritual aspect, an unforgettable experience, educational purposes."⁹¹ Interestingly, much like the other two writers, *Kahana* is also attacked for a lack of cohesiveness in her writing style and the novel is depicted by critics as "fragmented and incomplete" as the writer "lacks the epic breath necessary for the novel."⁹² *Kahana*'s novel is certainly written in a much plainer style than Eytan or

⁸⁸ Yaffah Berlovitz, "Hahofesh lefantez et haḥ ayim."

⁸⁹ Dikla Golomb, "Na'alim veḥ itzim" [Shoes and Arrows], *Lamerhav* 18 Nov. 1960.

⁹⁰ Golomb, *ibid*;

⁹¹ Idit Noyman, "Bein ahava veharpatka" [Between Love and Adventure], *Haboker* 1 June 1960: 6.

⁹² Cohen and compare with Kurtzweil on Fraenkel in Chapter 2. There the writer is commended for her "epic breath" but berated for lengthiness in other matters.

Schwartz's works. For today's reader, however, her bold treatment of taboo issues presents a fascinating read that is far from a superficial romance.

REWRITING THE LAW OF THE FATHER

During the British mandate rule in Palestine, Batya and Gina pursue their relationship as best friends and beyond. The two women, one a young kibbutz member, the other an older city dweller, spend long days together shopping and in cafés. Their relationship is an intimate one, filled with hugs, strokes and private nicknames: “She is the only one who calls me by my Hebrew name [*Malka*]” writes Gina in the diary “and it always feels like a caress that emphasizes our closeness” (45). Batya and Gina occupy the two possible roles for women in the national realm. As a mother and housewife, Gina's character seems to portray the ideal Zionist woman. According to Rachel Elboim-Dror, the main component in the representation of such a woman “was the role of motherhood, the mother of the family in the private-personal sphere, and the mother of the nation in the public one.”⁹³ Batya, on the contrary, clearly performs a stereotypically masculine role with her rugged physical appearance: “Always dressed in the same white shirt and blue skirt...her stubborn hair

⁹³ Rachel Elboim-Dror, “Ha'isha hatzionit ha'ide'alit” [The Ideal Zionist Woman], *Hatishma koli?* [Will You Listen to My Voice? Representations of Women in Israeli Culture], ed. Yael Atzmon (Tel Aviv: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute/ Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2001) 95-115; for a more general overview of fertility and the nation see Hazelton 63-91.

blown in the wind” (43), and her activity in the *Haganah*.⁹⁴ She also directs a masculine gaze at Gina: “Batya is very strict about my appearance and she makes sure I’m well-dressed” (43). Significantly, they nickname themselves David and Jonathan: close friends and possibly lovers, thus relying on an ostensible model of homoerotic relationship which underscores the entire novel.⁹⁵ By abiding by this model these two women carve themselves a clandestine space of representation. Indeed, part of Kahana’s subversiveness lies in the allusion to a lesbian relationship between the two women; from their depictions of one another: “She was tall, and the white of her skin, not burned yet by the sun, was a delight for the eyes” (24) as Batya describes her first encounter with Gina, to the portrayal of their relationship: “We are friends, sisters, **more than that!** since we’re not sisters in blood, by chance, but out of will—we chose one another, we’re David and Jonathan!” (64).⁹⁶ The nature of their connection

⁹⁴ The *Haganah* [literally defense] was the largest underground resistance to the British during the mandate rule and became the paramilitary organization of the Jewish settlers, later leading to the formation of the *Palmach*.

⁹⁵ For a discussion of the possible homoerotic relationship of David and Jonathan see Yaron Peleg, *Derekh gever: sifrut homoerotit* [Through Men: Representations of Homoeroticism in Modern Hebrew Literature 1880-2000] (Tel Aviv: Shufra, 2003) 10-14; or Susan Ackerman, *When Heroes Love: The Ambiguity of Eros in the Stories of Gilgamesh and David* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005).

⁹⁶ The emphasis here is mine. The first Israeli novels to explicitly deal with homoerotic relationships were *Davka'im* [The Spiders] and *Hatzole'a* [The Lame], two sensational novels published under the mysterious initials S.R.B, but Kahana appears to anticipate more conventional literary attempts to capture lesbian relationships. Some of these can be found in Shulamit Hareven’s story “Loneliness,” for example, see Shulamit Hareven, *Bedidut* [Loneliness: stories] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1980) 9-38. However: “Even today the lesbian scene of ‘Loneliness’ stands out as a sore thumb in a literature that has scarcely treated female homoeroticism,” Feldman, *No Room* 136.

remains implicit in the novel but I suggest here reading it through Adrienne Rich's definition of the "lesbian continuum":

To include a range—through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a richer inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support...we begin to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited, mostly clinical, definitions of lesbianism.⁹⁷

Thus, Rich's definition allows for a spectrum of relationships between women that challenge and undermine normative heterosexuality.

Whether the protagonists' relationship is platonic, or not, Batya and Gina cleverly camouflage its intimacy with their masculine nicknames.⁹⁸ The reference to Jonathan and David evokes bravery and camaraderie, but also a hidden passion which—only in the case of men—was culturally canonized.⁹⁹ Rich, for example, has compared homosexual and lesbian relationships and concluded that: "Lesbians have historically been deprived of political existence through 'inclusion' as female versions of male homosexuality...But there are differences: women's lack of economic and

⁹⁷ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985* (New York: Norton, 1986) 51.

⁹⁸ As Monique Wittig and Adrienne Rich have shown, lesbian relationships are just as important in terms of a political definition where women exist beyond their relationship to men. See Rich, "Compulsory heterosexuality" 23-73; Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

⁹⁹ Ackerman, *When Heroes Love*.

cultural privilege relative to men.”¹⁰⁰ Unlike homoerotic expressions, women’s love has remained outside the symbolic realm of Western culture. As Virginia Woolf noted when reading (the imaginary) Mary Carmichael: “Do not start. Do not blush. Let us admit in the privacy of our own society that these things sometimes happen. Sometimes women do like women.”¹⁰¹ In Kahana’s case, the two women may only pursue their relationship in the disguise of a similar male love story. Naming themselves after men suggests that both long for the kind of power of representation they, as women, are denied. As we shall soon see, each of them moves on to interpret differently the meaning of this power and its relation to national identity.

While Batya plays a somewhat platonic role in Gina's life, Gina soon finds a formal lover in Ibrahim Khubaji, a Lebanese merchant who works with her husband.¹⁰² They first meet in a store where Gina shops for nylon stockings and in the darkness of the shop suddenly notices “a tall, stout man—an oriental type. A handsome face... the nose a bit humped” (44). When he shows up as a client of her husband he begins to court her aggressively. Ibrahim, like Batya, offers Gina everything that her urban, bourgeois life and her gentle yet distant husband cannot. Nevertheless, their passionate affair takes place only after she involves him in a dangerous national assignment. Ironically, in their struggle for personal empowerment, Gina and Batya manipulate

¹⁰⁰ Rich, 218.

¹⁰¹ Woolf, *A Room* 82. While Woolf speaks of "like" and not love, the connotation of blushing and of things left unspoken, as well as her biography, suggest otherwise.

¹⁰² There is a clear correlation between Batya and Ibrahim: both are very masculine in looks and behavior, which will be further discussed.

their role-playing relationship in the service of the nation. Batya, is sent by the *Haganah* to hide a suitcase filled with weapons in order to protect the underground male members. Although an active participant in the Haganah, her womanhood protects her from immediate suspicion of the British. Batya contacts Gina through their biblical personas quoting Shmuel 1, ch. 20, verse 22: “The arrows are beyond thee,” Jonathan’s warning to David when Saul is out to kill him. This warning also signifies the point where Jonathan chooses David over his own family and over the kingdom of Saul. By applying the masculine-canonical code the two women go beyond simply appropriating the “the father’s tongue,” to rewriting it for their own needs. Their performance of a national task “disguised” by their male pseudonyms (that in fact belong to their intimate dialogue) inverts the "natural" order here, where the "father’s tongue" is first claimed as personal and then reissued in the public sphere that rejects them. Hence, employing this “natural” code is of course ironic in our context as the two women are constantly relegated from the public sphere. Batya is allowed to participate only in a limited number of underground activities, while Gina is expected to stay at home and entertain her husband’s guests. The problem with adopting the masculine model, warns Tova Cohen, is that women writers will assimilate completely into the patriarchal canon internalizing its language.¹⁰³ However, by appropriating this heroic, masculine biblical text, with its erotic undertones,

¹⁰³ Cohen "Betokh hatarbut."

Kahana subverts it, turning it into a form of intimate communication between the two women while the national story remains a background to their private narrative.¹⁰⁴

Gina, like Jonathan, is willing to risk her own life for Batya, displaying total indifference to the national cause. She shows up at Batya's house pretending to look for her suitcase and continues to ask both Ibrahim, her companion for that evening, as well as a British officer to carry the goods for her. Gina succeeds, risking her life for her beloved friend, yet for both women this escalation in their relationship becomes a turning point. The two are quickly separated (by Gina's husband and Batya's parents) supposedly as a punishment for their national activities. Thus, Batya, who earlier equated weapons with power, saying: "With this piece in my hand I'm the master of my life" (42) is sent by her worried parents to study abroad.¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, Gina, who falls ill, is diagnosed with hysteria, a stereotypical female disease. Following Freud's studies of hysteria scholars like Mary Jacobus and Peter Logan pointed out that:

"Hysteria is associated with woman's exclusion from the sphere of representation, the symbolic that is necessarily gendered male."¹⁰⁶ Thus, after reluctantly taking part in

¹⁰⁴ For more on the differences between appropriation and subversion see Feldman, "A People that Dwells," 84-87.

¹⁰⁵ In Hebrew the clearly masculine "*adon lehayay*."

¹⁰⁶ Mary Jacobus, *Reading Woman: Essays in Feminist Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 249-275; Peter Melville Logan, *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 9. Interestingly, Jacobus depicts in her book how the writer Charlotte Gilman was instructed to "live as domestic a life as possible. Have your child with you all the time...and never touch pen brush or pencil as long as you live," a prescription which nearly drove her mad. In Jacobus, 230. Perhaps for Gina this breakdown signifies even more than exclusion from

the national struggle Gina is immediately removed from it by being labeled with a “feminine illness,” one which quickly relegates her back to her formal position as housewife and mother. In addition, she writes to Batya asking her not to come by: “I’m afraid Moshe will insult her somehow because he is very angry with her” (80). Interestingly, earlier in the novel, her doctor advises her to become pregnant, preferably with a son in order to cure her nerves. In other words, according to patriarchal rule, for Gina to heal she needs to produce a male heir and to become a standard mother in the service of the nation—thus ensuring a space of representation for herself.

This demand further enhances the differences between Gina and Batya in the novel, as the two examples of the manner in which women are excluded from the national discourse. While “nationalist ideology sets up Woman as victim and goddess simultaneously,”¹⁰⁷ this ambivalence towards women within the national discourse can take two forms. The first, by denoting women as “special cases” which further reinforces the collective narrative rather than providing a representation of it. Thus, Batya seems to fulfill the Zionist claim of equality when she participates in the *Haganah* activities, but even then she is used as a cover for the real activists (i.e. men), and when she takes too many risks her parents urge her out of the country. The

representation. Since her feelings for both her best friend and the Arab merchant are forbidden, her illness may be viewed as an attempt to retreat from her duties as a wife and mother. For a feminist exploration of hysteria in Hebrew literature see Feldman, *No Room* 193-223.

¹⁰⁷ Radhakrishnan 85. This is also true within Western culture in general, see also Gilbert and Gubar 17-24.

second, by relegating the woman into the symbolic realm where she is expected to represent the nation as well as produce it " [as the] pure and ahistorical signifier of 'interiority,'" ¹⁰⁸ just like Gina who is expected to become a mother of the national subject. Interestingly, the fact that she is already a mother—of two girls—is deemed irrelevant since they are unaccounted for in the national narrative. As Partha Chatterjee points out, "the battle for the new idea of womanhood in the era of nationalism was waged in the home." ¹⁰⁹ In this division of labor women reproduce, as well as represent the nation, while men conquer and rule it. Although Gina obeys the law of the father, she radically reinterprets the national assignment.

CROSSING BORDERS OF GENDER AND NATION

Sent to rest in Lebanon, Gina crosses the border—literally—to undermine the same national discourse which forces her and Batya to adopt masculine personas. Since her sexuality is subordinate to the national requirements and since her relationship with Batya is denied, her passion is seemingly redirected to its proper heterosexual form. ¹¹⁰ Instead, Gina turns to break the boundaries in the national realm. In Lebanon she ends up having a passionate affair with Ibrahim. Interestingly, the novel suggests many resemblances between Batya and Ibrahim. Both court Gina,

¹⁰⁸ Radhakrishnan 84.

¹⁰⁹ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 133. Chatterjee also claims that because the woman question was discussed in the private domain (in India), its history must be read within it in diaries, autobiographies, letters, etc.

¹¹⁰ On the notion of "compulsory heterosexuality" see Rich.

protect her, and call her by her Hebrew name Malka—queen. Both also expose a merciless side, which relates to their physical power: Batya, when she launches into nationalistic speeches, and Ibrahim, in the treatment of his servants. At first it seems as though Gina discovers her sexuality with Ibrahim: “Only now did I understand the secret of the primitive, crude and supreme pleasure. Should I be ashamed of what my flesh demands?” (113). But, as we soon find out, she is out to get something quite different—the son she dreams of, the son the nation demands of her. When she does, she quickly deserts Ibrahim and writes in her diary: “From here, from this quiet room my thanks are sent to you, the man. You, a passionate lover, a strong male...you knew how to be fed and how to feed. And now I am satiated. I no longer need you...you gave me a son” (128). There is, of course, more than a touch of orientalism embedded in this virile depiction of Ibrahim in the novel: “in Europe we used to see this type of face drawn on Turkish cigarette boxes...a beautiful, slightly arrogant face”(44), muses Gina after their first meeting. In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said traces the boundaries constituted between the familiar (read normal and natural) European legacies, and the strange and deviant character of the East. On the one hand, the East was associated with spirituality, stability, and simplicity. On the other hand it was barbaric, primitive, and backward.¹¹¹ In Kahana’s case, however, Ibrahim is not presented as the dark, frightening yet alluring other but rather as a well-educated, rich

¹¹¹ Said, *Orientalism*.

gentleman, thus weakening the binaries Said depicts in his work.¹¹² Although Ibrahim fulfils Western fantasies when his virility is the one which fertilizes Gina, exactly where her husband fails, Kahana's orientalist portrayal is not without irony. In a sense, Kahana, through Gina, ridicules here the same vision of the virile, proud Arab that the Zionist movement adored when the first pioneers arrived in Palestine. The members of *Hashomer* [The Watcher], the first Jewish defense organization which operated in Palestine during the years of the Turkish rule, admired the Bedouin man and tried to dress and act like him. The Bedouins possessed: "Everything that the Jew lacked: courage, chivalry, natural nobility, natural devotion to the land, rootedness."¹¹³ Itamar Even-Zohar explains this admiration as part of the process of creating the "new Jewish man" by "translating" familiar images—in their case the Russian Cossacks, the descendants of Ukraine fighters known for the bravery as well as cruelty—to their new reality through the Bedouin figure.¹¹⁴ If the local Arabs were to serve as role models, then Gina's move is only the next logical step whereby a new, braver, stronger dynasty shall be produced by Jewish women.¹¹⁵

¹¹² Another interpretation of the oriental other is explored in Shoshana Shrir'a's *Lehem ha'ohavim* [Lovers' Bread], see discussion in Chapter 4.

¹¹³ Itamar Even-Zohar, "Hatzmiḥ a vehahitgabshut shel tarbut ivrit mekomit veyelidit be'ereẓ yisra'el 1882-1948" [The Emergence of a Native Hebrew Culture in Palestine 1882-1948], *Katedra* 16 (1980): 165-189; and see also Israel Bartal, *Cossac vebedui* [Cossack and Bedouin: Land and People in Jewish Nationalism] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2007). For more on the representation of the Arab as a "noble savage" in Hebrew literature see Oppenheimer, 52-75.

¹¹⁴ Even-Zohar 175.

¹¹⁵ Elboim-Dror gives the opposite example of the *Hashomer* movement's men who fantasize: "Let's take four Bedouins for each of us...strong and healthy women ...[the

Gina, however, names her son Zvi, another reminder of her relationship with Batya as the name appears in David's lament of Saul and Jonathan: "Thy beauty, O Israel, upon thy high places is slain! How are the mighty fallen!"¹¹⁶ In biblical Hebrew the name Zvi (literally gazelle) is synonymous with beauty and grace. Indeed the boy is handsome, a mixture of his parents with his dark eyes and blonde hair. Although he is Ibrahim's son, Gina feels he also belongs to Batya: "Batya calls him Absalom—because of his beauty and long curls. If he is Absalom then he is her son—since she is David" (129). The affair with Ibrahim is then portrayed not only as a national act of subversion, but also as a projection of the forbidden relationship between the two women.

By having a son with the Arab lover, Gina undermines her feminine-national role of producing the Zionist dynasty and at the same time gains the authority she craves both by deciding on her son's father, and through her writing which documents the events. Indeed, the diary Gina writes provides more than a mere confessional tool. Given to her as a wedding gift by an old aunt who tells her that: "There are moments in a woman's life she cannot share with her mother, her husband, her children" (40), the diary represents both an atelier and a refuge from the national-patriarchal discourse which suffocates her: "The habit of writing in my diary has become a necessity. It's human nature to confide in someone. Now my heart is quiet and at ease. This is

Bedouin woman] is not eager to read books and her mind is not confused by theories, within one generation a strong and large tribe will arise, the tribe of *Hashomer*," in Elboim Dror 101.

¹¹⁶ II Samuel 1:19.

probably how princesses felt in fairytales when the evil sorcerer took his spell off them” (86). Gina's diary may be read as personal-feminine writing but its nature also alludes to what H el ene Cixous suggests in the French feminist concept of  criture feminine: “It does and it will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophical-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatism, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate.”¹¹⁷ By positioning the diary at the center of the novel Kahana makes a sophisticated narrative statement. On the one hand, she clearly chooses a feminine path of writing: the personal, emotional (read not intellectual) diary. Traditionally this writing was also considered suitable for women not only because it could be written quickly and in fragments, but also because: “The middle-class woman with time on her hands can console and amuse herself by keeping a diary, and confiding in a diary offers a prudent substitute for potentially dangerous confidences made to a friend.”¹¹⁸ Thus, the diary supposedly protects Gina from devoting her energy and creativity to unwanted purposes. Moreover, *The Arrows* is framed so it opens with a man (Zvika) who is the reader, the one through whose gaze the text is perceived. Hence, while most of the novel revolves around Gina’s diary it is still bracketed by the opening and closing

¹¹⁷ H el ene Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” *New French Feminisms*, eds. Mark Elaine and Isabelle de Courtivron (Brighton: Harvester, 1980) 245-64. I'm using Cixous here not in the sense of transcending language and gender binaries but as a means to illuminate Kahana's choice of genre (the diary novel) as subversive.

¹¹⁸ Lorena Martens, *The Diary Novel* 173.

which are told through the son's point of view.¹¹⁹ In Gina's case, however, the writing doesn't contain the woman, only her secret—the secret of the son's real identity.

On the other hand, this traditional format continually challenges normative, patriarchal and national patterns throughout the novel, especially when these dictate the role of women at home and in society at large. Thus, it is the diary novel which allows for the voice of an unprecedented heroine in the literature of the time: the bourgeoisie housewife—albeit one who has an intimate relationship with her female best friend and an extramarital affair with an Arab—to be heard. The specific poetics of the diary “makes possible the expression of an individual experience that is unable to identify meaningfully with social reality. Its author can retreat to the limited but safe ground of the first person singular.”¹²⁰ Through this format Kahana is able to explore risqué territories more easily than the other writers discussed earlier. In her case the diary is a “novel in disguise,” a subversive reading of the national narrative both in content and in form.

In fact, it seems that for Gina writing takes precedence even to the actual event. She is so anxious to capture her relationship with Ibrahim and her son's birth that, as Yaffah Berlovitz suggests: “It often appears that in accepting this love she searches not only adventure and excitement but a dialogue with herself and her

¹¹⁹ Thus anticipating Amalia Kahana-carmon's 1991 novel *Liviti otah baderekh levietah* [I walked her Home] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad); for discussion and interpretation see Feldman *No room* 84-89.

¹²⁰ Martens 187.

writing.”¹²¹ Indeed, it seems that she pursues the affair almost so she can have a subject for writing. Once she has the baby, however, her writing time is constantly interrupted and soon thereafter the diary ends.

THE ROMANCE NOVEL AS AN ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE

In a essay from 1995 Yaffah Belovitz reviews Batya Kahana’s two novels defining them as the first romance novels in Hebrew literature. What, wonders Berlovitz, possessed Kahana to pursue this model even when it completely contradicted the literary and national norms of the period. “Is it an attempt to establish a woman’s alternative writing? Is it offered as a model for the new Israeli woman, married and independent at the same time? Or is she taunting the leading literary community and its conventions?”¹²² Berlovitz concludes that the answer to these questions is "all of the above" yet continues to characterize Kahana’s literature as a playful rest from the serious, nationally ridden literature of the period. As we have seen here, Kahana allows for a radically subversive content glazed by the melodramatic story, and the seemingly private-feminine aesthetics of journal writing. This also meant that her novel hardly alludes to other texts especially within modern Hebrew literature, the way Eytan and Schwartz have, thus clearly locating herself outside the literary canon. By choosing a marginal poetic position from the very

¹²¹ Berlovitz, “Haḥ ofesh lefantez.”

¹²² Berlovitz, “Haḥ ofesh lefantez.”

beginning, Kahana's writing allows for a much bolder move, in content, than the others.

The closing scenes of the novel portray a dramatic turn of events. The diary ends with Zvi's birth and the narrative then returns to the young man reading about his own identity: "What is this? What happened here? Who am I and to whom am I?—the thought pounded in his temples" (130). Zvika then reminisces on his mother's death during the War of Independence. He was playing with his friends and his mother could not find him. Frantic, she runs to the street and is hit by a bomb. Thus, in the end it appears as though Gina is punished for her acts when she dies while searching for her missing son. The same son, now an Israeli soldier, decides to immediately return home and spend time with his father, Moshe, in what appears as a repression of what he had just discovered. Gina's death, however, can be read as a continuation of the alternative story Kahana demarcates. Unlike the traditional national narrative, here it is the mother who dies, not the son. She is then commemorated by her own, personal writing and not by national anthems à la Alterman (in poems like "The Third Mother" for example).¹²³ Thus, under the guise of a passionate love story, dismissed by some of the critics as a B-class romance literature that "unfortunately [includes] only distant echoes of this turbulent period (the underground activities during the British

¹²³ As the leading poet of the 1940s Nathan Alterman was known for his patriotic poems about the youth fighting and dying in the name of the national cause. The most wellknown example is his 1947 poem "Magash hakesef" [The Silver Tray], which tells the story of a boy and a girl who died in order to serve the state on a silver platter. It has since become one of the most recited poems in Israeli culture and therefore in its collective memory as well.

mandate),”¹²⁴ Kahana manages to produce an alternative text to both the Zionist story and the models prevalent in Hebrew literature during her time.

WOMEN WRITING WOMEN: THE CASE OF THE GENDER-BIASED REVIEW

In *Nashim umasekhot* [Women and Masks] Chaya Shacham demonstrates how critics have often employed an entire feminine semantic field in order to categorize women’s poetry in Hebrew, where their writing was depicted as: “minor,” “pleasant,” “indulgent,” “woven,” “sewed” or “cooked.”¹²⁵ As was evident in the review cited in the beginning of this chapter, a similar case can be argued here as well. As we have seen in Chapter 1, Israeli women writers who chose the novel as their literary medium were doubly displaced. This choice necessarily leads us to examine the reception of these novels during the 1960s when a new generation of writers—the state generation—changed the literary scene in Israel. While the three novels discussed here were differently received, some interesting resemblances exist among the book reviews from the period, especially in terms of treating the works as “feminine” in nature. Reading these consecutively, as an ongoing text, may partly provide the answer to why most of the novelists discussed in this dissertation wrote only one or two novels and came to a halt, never attempting write novels again.

¹²⁴ Golomb.

¹²⁵ Chaya Shacham, *Nashim umasekhot* [Women and Masks: From Lot’s Wife to Cinderella, Representations of the Female Image in Hebrew Women’s Poetry] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001).

Hence, when first reviewed (for some it was also later on as was the case with Rachel Eytan) all three writers did not escape some classic feminine stereotypes. Whether positive or negative, the critics describe the novels using various feminine adjectives and verbs such as: “colorful elegance,” “intentional beautifying,” “coquetry,” “serving the readers with a bloody-Mary cocktail on a hot summer,” “a festive gossip-dinner, well-seasoned dishes heaped and served with grace and generosity,” “sentimental writing,” “an explosion of emotions,” and so on.¹²⁶ Thus, while Kahana was immediately relegated to the realm of sensationalist feminine, “cheap” literature, Eytan and Schwartz were differently addressed, although both were commended for demonstrating worthy (male) writing-abilities. Whereas Eytan was praised for avoiding sentimentality where “the mere background [of life at the institute] could have served...to trigger the tear glands of good women,”¹²⁷ Schwartz was reproached for her lack of tenderness: “It seems that the last thing you can say about *Eve Gottlieb* is that a woman wrote it...it lacks a personal style...and has not a single measure of delicateness.”¹²⁸ Thus, critics addressed both the writers' and their heroines' sex, awarding them stereotypical gender traits, sometimes without differentiation between the real and the fictive woman. Consequently, women’s writing was trivialized as such and certainly was not treated as an alternative or a novelty. As we will see in the next

¹²⁶ The Hebrew original of these reads:

התחננות גנדרנית מכוונת, אלגנטיות ססגונית, הגישה לקוראיה קוקטייל נוסח בלאדי מרי בקיץ הלוחט הזה, סעודת רכילות חגיגית, גדושת מנות, מתובלת בטוב טעם, ומוגשת בחן וברוח נדיבה, כתיבה סנטימנטלית, התפרצות של רגשות.

¹²⁷ Shaked, "Al benei adam" 21.

¹²⁸ Hayerushalmi, "Olam muzar."

chapter, some of this language (as well as attitude) changed when women writers began to write about men, rather than women.

Nation and Family

“Why has the ‘New Hebrew Woman,’ supposedly fostered by Zionism...disappeared on her way to literary representation?” asks Yael Feldman in *No Room of Their Own*.¹²⁹ This question, which frames Feldman’s study, underscores the struggle of women novelists within Israeli literature. This chapter followed different representation of the Israeli woman and the various components of her identity. Although each of the heroines in the novels struggles with the national gaze through which she is supposed to either symbolize nation or produce it, the national realm in all three novels was either ignored or attacked by the critics. Apparently, the writers were not expected to deal with the national discourse, and if they did, they were presumed lacking in proper abilities to do so. Since in this discourse women are often envisioned as part of the private sphere—the family—the acts of subversion offered by Eytan, Schwartz and Kahana are manifested by female characters who live and create outside domestic confinement.

One of the chapters in the *Fifth Heaven* is devoted to the story of Raffi. “Stinking” Raffi is an awkward, rejected child whose mother shows up one day to learn about her lost son. At the same time, the institute is preparing for the arrival of benefactors who will tour the place and meet the children. As part of the preparation

¹²⁹ Feldman, *No Room* 7.

the kids “plant” some branches with leaves in the yard to create a momentary garden, an illusion of a stable and warm environment. When Raffi’s mother appears, clearly disappointed by the somewhat awkward child, his status suddenly changes and everyone longs to escort him as he prepares to leave the hostel. After a short while it turns out to be a case of mistaken identity. Left behind at the institute, Raffi wanders “alone, as if gripped by a frenzy, dragging and uprooting new ‘plants’ from the muddy earth, carrying a branch, waving it in the air with maniacal triumph and uttering cries of sheer helplessness: ‘No--o roots! No--o roots! No roots!’”¹³⁰

This short episode, depicting fake hominess, serves as a poignant metaphor of family relations in all three novels. Maya, Eve and Gina all play different roles within the nuclear family: the unwanted child, the rebellious daughter and the unfaithful mother. Whether they come from a broken family or create the rift themselves, their familial situation is far from the ideal national perception of family.¹³¹ Indeed, many theories of nationalism compare the relationships within the (imaginary) community to a natural, family bond.¹³² In the Israeli context, for example, the state of Israel was declared a “national home” in the Balfore Declaration (1917) even before 1948. But it is when the home falls apart that the boundaries between public and private are truly blurred. The family is treated as a sacred space symbolically separated by the front door of the

¹³⁰ Eytan 263.

¹³¹ Although in the history of Zionism and therefore in that of modern Hebrew literature the *talush* figure leaves his family life behind in order to build the nation, it is the latter that serves as the family replacement. In any case, it was a man’s privilege, while women, especially mothers, were demanded at the home sphere.

¹³² See Anderson.

house, claims Pierre Bourdieu, but at the same time it is one of those social fictions that are "seen as a reality transcending its members."¹³³ Hannah Naveh describes the family as a myth intending to regulate as well as enlist its members in the service of proper social behavior.¹³⁴ Paradoxically, as Anne McClintock shows: "National 'progress' (conventionally, the invented domain of the male, public sphere) was figured as familial, while the family itself (conventionally, the domain of the private, female space) was figured as beyond history."¹³⁵

In the case of women, the breakdown of the family is particularly meaningful since they find themselves without the definition of their traditional gender roles within it, thus perhaps opening a path outside the patriarchal surveillance of the family. Although women are expected to establish the "appropriate home" according to Western-patriarchal standards, once they rebel they also threaten the coherence and uniformity of the national narrative.¹³⁶ Nevertheless, this is not a case of national allegory, as depicted by Fredric Jameson.¹³⁷ For Jameson literature in a newly nationalized society is necessarily recruited to represent the national struggle. While this was sometimes the case for canonical Hebrew literature, especially during the

¹³³ Pierre Bourdieu, "On the Family as a Realized Category," *Theory, Culture and Society* 13.3 (1996): 20.

¹³⁴ Naveh, "Al ahavat."

¹³⁵ Anne McClintock, "Family Feuds."

¹³⁶ For some interesting guidelines see Ofra Tene, "Kakh nevashel bayit beyisra'el" [How to Cook Home in Israel: Reading Cookbooks from the 1930s-1980s], *Beten mele'ah* [A Full Belly: Rethinking Food and Society in Israel], ed. Aviad Kleinberg (Tel Aviv University Press and Keter Books, 2005) 92-130.

¹³⁷ Jameson, "Third World Literature."

1940s and early 1950s, as we have seen in Chapter 1, for the female interwar novelists, the relation between gender and nation, and between the family as a synecdoche of the nation is, if anything, counter-allegorical. The writers here aim to interrupt and fracture the national narrative rather than represent it or even invert it. Although their works necessarily correspond and respond to national crisis, the latter serves to highlight their heroines and their struggle with stereotypical gender roles and their initiations as artists, writers, and sexual beings. The women portrayed thus precede the prevailing national identity, whereas the need of each of these protagonists to create, via writing or painting, further underlines their need to produce an alternative narrative. If we believe Jameson's statement that "libidinal investment is to be read in primarily political and social terms,"¹³⁸ we negate their primary identities in the text as women and artists. Whether they succeed in their struggle or not, the active journey for expression subverts their designated role as (nationalized) women. As we have seen here, the younger the protagonist the easier it is for her to rewrite her feminine destiny while the other, older heroines are doomed for death even when it is a subversive one.

Reading these novels through the prism of gender and nation ties together the different layers of the works and provides us with a deeper understanding of the issues occupying the first novels to be written by Israeli women. Their protagonists are the forgotten heroines of the Israeli story representing neither national ideals, nor an

¹³⁸ Jameson 72.

"anxiety of influence" model. So to answer Feldman's question, the new Hebrew woman, whether real or fictive, was excluded from the literary arena because she was not thought to represent anyone, and probably since such potential representation would have defied her role within the national model. In fact, without the family category to domesticate and define them, these characters were supposed to lack representation in the public-national sphere. As we will see in the next chapter, when women chose to write about life in post-state Israel, they focused on male protagonists; this did not prevent them from further questioning gender roles, perhaps even more bluntly.

CHAPTER 4

UNDOING NATIONAL MANHOOD

MARGINAL MEN IN YEHUDIT HENDEL AND SHOSHANA SHRIRA

In *Founding Mothers, Step Sisters* a work dedicated to the emergence of modern Hebrew women's poetry, beginning in the 1920s, Dan Miron claimed that one of the problems for women writers, during the first half of the twentieth century, was the absence of the young Jewish woman as a literary model. Moreover, "whereas the experience of the young Jewish man is presented as a metonymy of the national experience, the experience of the young Jewish woman is usually interpreted as a private-personal one."¹ Women's writing, in general, as we have seen in Chapter 1, has traditionally been described as private and detached from the collective (and national) experience. For the women writers of modern Hebrew Literature there was not an equivalent of the *talush*, the *halutz* or the *sabra*. In the previous chapter we have seen how three writers chose to tackle this issue by choosing unconventional female figures: a young girl who dictates her own future, a young woman who escapes her orthodox background and a married woman who defies conventions. Other writers during this period have experimented with different representations by choosing men as their protagonists. Much like choices of language appropriation we previously

¹ Dan Miron, *Imahot meyasdot, aḥayiot ḥorgot* [Founding Mothers, Step Sisters] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1991) 67.

discussed, adopting male characters has certainly helped writers like Yehudit Hendel and Shoshana Shrira to locate their novels more easily within the literary canon. By offering a male protagonist they seemingly provided the collective hero demanded by the young Israeli literature of their time. But this façade has served as a new tool to examine familiar questions. By subverting manhood, especially in its national sense, these writers have managed to expose the relations between gender and nation in profound, new ways, no less than their peers who focused on women protagonists. In this chapter I will examine two such novels: Yehudit Hendel's *Rehov hamadregot* [The Street of Steps; 1954] and Shoshana Shrira's *Lehem ha'ohavim* [Lovers' Bread; 1957]. Again we are comparing a canonized, successful work which has even been republished in 1998—Hendel's book— and a lesser-known novel (although Shrira's work received some critical recognition at the time it was published). Significantly, the two writers chose marginal male protagonists—a Sephardi *Palmach* fighter and a Polish immigrant—who struggle with identity conflicts, before, during, and after the War of Independence, the founding experience of their generation. However, the novels differ greatly from the *Palmach* writing of their time in themes, language, and most of all in the conclusions they reach and the questions they raise in the face of a nationally driven literature. In order to fully explore the manner in which Hendel and Shrira challenge traditional national axioms as well as gender roles in their novels, it is pivotal that we devote further discussion to the gendering of Zionism, this time,

however, through the lens of masculinity and manhood a topic discussed often in recent scholarship.

As we have previously established, the Zionist narrative was certainly a gendered one.² While the land was imagined as a woman, the new Jewish man became its redeemer.³ Like many other nations during the 19th century, the body, and particularly the male body became the Jewish national symbol, a portrait of strength and nobility. As George Mosse shows in his work on masculinity and nationalism, it “was thought to symbolize society’s need for order and progress, as well as middle-class virtues such as self-control and moderation.”⁴ The Zionist discourse on the national body, much influenced by these theories, aimed to create what Max Nordau famously termed “a Judaism of muscles.”⁵ According to this notion, Jewish men needed to redeem themselves and their people by creating healthy and strong bodies, an image that stood in contrast to the pale, frail and somewhat effeminate figure of the Yeshiva student. As various scholars have shown, both Nordau and Herzl—the key figures in central-European Zionism—cultivated an image of strong muscular Jews as a cure for Jewish degeneration.⁶ Moreover, as Daniel Boyarin argues, in many cases Jewish intellectuals in the 19th century perceived Zionism “as much a cure for the

² See discussion in Chapter 1.

³ For a critique see Michael Gluzman, *Haguf hatzioni*.

⁴ George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man* 9.

⁵ Max Nordau as cited in the second Zionist congress in Basel, qtd. in Gluzman, *Haguf hatzioni* 19; see also footnote 41 in Chapter 2.

⁶ See David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 177-184.

disease of Jewish gendering as a solution to economic and political problems of the Jewish people.”⁷ Boyarin even goes further to say that in Herzl’s case “nationalism was an instrument in the search for manliness.”⁸ Thus, we clearly see how the Zionist national movement was closely related to, and depended heavily on, images of masculinity as produced by the middle-class Christian European world of the 19th century. Hebrew literature, accordingly, began addressing this new image by either hailing imaginary masculine figures such as Saul Tcernichovski’s *Apollo* and Moshe Smilanski’s *Khawaja Nazar* or mercilessly portraying the image of sexually and nationally impotent men, like the protagonists of Gnessin and Brenner.⁹ In *The Zionist Body*, Michael Gluzman follows the evolvement of the concept of the body within the Zionist discourse from a metaphor of the nation, to a materialized notion of the “muscle Jew,” to what Gluzman sees as the determining phase where the body “becomes a regulatory ideal. That is, to turn the body into an effective ideological component it has to be rewritten, it has to be stripped of its flesh and turned into an ‘ideal’.”¹⁰ This circular move appropriates the male body and sets the standards for its perfect image. These different phases have eventually culminated in the creation of the

⁷ Boyarin 177.

⁸ Boyarin 302.

⁹ For more on Tcernichovski and Smilanski see Gluzman, *Haguf hatzioni* 13, 26. Even though his effeminate characters are weak and pathetic, in his essays Brenner attacked the images of the "New Hebrew Man" which he saw as an internalization of the European nationalized masculinity and a form of self-hatred. In Brenner, "Rishmei hakore" [The Reader’s Impressions], *Ketavim* [Collected Works], vol. 3 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1985) 793-801.

¹⁰ Gluzman, *Haguf hatzioni* 31.

ultimate Jewish man—the *sabra*. According to Oz Almog, this young, handsome man who was either born in Palestine or immigrated there at a young age, “became the national symbol of the young state and reflected the symbolic-mythological analogy between the beauty of the newly born state and the beauty of her young sabras.”¹¹ One such example was Moshe Shamir’s brother Elik, the subject of a well-known autobiography. Elik, who in Shamir’s famous words, was “born of the waves,” was read by some of the critics as representing the final detachment from the Jewish past.¹² This Zionist Venus, however, became an obstacle in the way of Hebrew literature which found itself struggling to write under, or against the long shadow of the myth of the *sabra*. In this chapter we will look at Hendel and Shriria’s construction and deconstruction of gender roles in their novels, and how they challenge and undermine national manhood.

WATCHING LIFE THROUGH A WINDOW: *The Street of Steps*

The street of steps was not really a street, but rather an alley of steps where the houses crowded one upon another leaving no space for light or air to penetrate. And when the thresholds were deserted, they seemed devoid of life. In winter the houses were poorly heated, if they were heated at all, their walls exuded dampness and mold (9; 9-10).¹³

¹¹ Oz Almog, 18.

¹² Moshe Shamir, *Bemo yadav* [With His Own Hands] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1970) 9. For the manner in which Elik has been received by readers see Shaked, *Hasiporet* Vol. 4 234; for a retrospective look at the reception of Shamir's novels see Arik Glasner, "Keitzad mezika umo'ila hahistoria leyitsirato shel ha'ivri haḥ adash" [How History Damages and Helps in the Making of the New Hebrew Man], *Emda* 12-13 (2004): 55-67.

¹³ All quotations hereafter are from Yehudit Hendel, *The Street of Steps*, trans. Rachel Katz and David Segal (New York: Herzl Press, 1963); the page numbers refer to the

The novel *The Street of Steps* opens with the depiction of the street captured in its title. The physical image serves here to illustrate its suffocating effect. This is a poor Sephardi neighborhood in 1950s downtown Haifa where the children hang out on the streets, the smells of cooking and laundry invade the air and many of the street's residents sit outside their stuffy houses while "the women of the alley were forever pregnant, or nursing some tiny, green and shrieking creature"(10; 10).¹⁴ Yet this crowded, smelly and poor environment is also a warm and comforting enclave in an urban surrounding. Into this scene enters the protagonist of Hendel's novel, Avram (Ram) Bachar. A young man who is making his first steps in the newly established Israeli state, Ram is caught inbetween identities. On the one hand, he is a former war hero who has fought in Israel's War of Independence risking his life more than once to save his fellow soldiers. On the other hand, the son of a poor widower who survives on selling stale nuts, he struggles to both earn a living working as a sailor on a cargo ship, and earn his place within the new socio-economic hierarchy of the state. Although he grew up on the street of steps, Ram wrestles throughout the novel with his place in and outside the neighborhood. His journeys to and from the street, away to foreign countries via the sea but most of all to the upper city of Haifa—the Carmel

Hebrew original, Yehudit Hendel, *Rehov hamadregot* (1954; Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1998) and the English translation respectively.

¹⁴ I'm using the term Sephardi here to differentiate between those Jews of a Sephardi heritage who already lived in *Eretz Yisra'el* pre-1948 and Mizrahi Jews who arrived after the War of Independence and were thus labeled later on.

ridge—creates the framework for this novel. The novel's five segments follow four days in Ram's life (from his and other points of view) as he struggles to find a new job in order to prove to his (Ashkenazi) girlfriend's father that he is worthy as her future husband. This is when he discovers his former glory has lost its status. Apparently, his old army buddies "the bigger nobodies they were, the better they knew how to get settled—and the filthier bootlickers they became, kowtowing to anybody and everybody. The minute the State was set up they got the idea they needed positions, positions, positions" (22; 24). Ram's failure leads him to beg the father of one of his former soldiers for a job, and when the latter patronizes him he tears up an honorary letter he received after the war, thus tearing up his former identity as a brave commander. It is in the next day that he writes Erella's father a letter of his own, one which argues, in broken Hebrew: "If you think I'm not good enough to be your daughter's husband—I don't care whether you're right or not. I can't make you see it otherwise" (132; 154). The letter reflects the two different worlds Ram and Erella (Ella) represent and these geographical and socio-economical differences are reiterated throughout *The Street of Steps*. The couple's breathless meetings during these few days illustrate the cartography of the novel where Sephardi Jews and new immigrants live downtown in the suffocating street of steps, while the Ashkenazi elite resides on the hills above overlooking the sea. In her first novel, Yehudit Hendel offers a sophisticated, seemingly understated, criticism of the Zionist endeavor and she does so by questioning Jewish national identity and the its affiliation with gender and state.

Thus, Ram's final journey in the novel—back to the sea—not only contradicts the Zionist narrative as it was constructed and reflected in Israeli literature, but also challenges its very foundations. The national trajectory is further complicated by the reversal of gender roles in the novel, highlighting masculinity and its strong correlation with the national narrative. My reading will then suggest a new framing of the *The Street of Steps*, while taking into account its previous interpretations and expanding them further through the added prisms of gender and nation.

Born in Poland in 1925, arriving in Palestine in 1930, Yehudit Hendel appeared to be a natural member of the *Palmach* generation. Like many of her peers, she joined the *Palmach* and began publishing short stories during the 1940s. Yet, almost immediately Hendel adopted a different outlook than most writers in her time and, unlike many of the authors discussed here, went on to a prolific writing career. Her early short stories (later published as a collection), focused on the perspective of the outsider: Holocaust survivors, women and handicaps.¹⁵ Many of these themes resonate within her first novel.

The different trajectories explored in *The Street of Steps*:—up and down the city, across the street, out to the sea—are clearly affiliated with issues of social injustice in the new, somewhat corrupt, Israeli state. This theme has already been widely discussed in previous readings of the novel—both early and more

¹⁵ Yehudit Hendel, *Anashim aḥerim hem* [They Are different People] (Merhavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1950).

contemporary ones.¹⁶ Published in 1954, the novel quickly gained critical, as well as, commercial success. Hendel won the Asher Barash prize for young writers (the work was judged anonymously) soon after. In their comments the judges praised the writer for “raising one of the most painful problems of our generation: the problem of the melting pot, the ingathering of the tribes into one people.”¹⁷ Although the novel was well-received by both the critics and readers, almost all of the reviews surveyed here are mixed in tone. Indeed, most of the early reviews praised the author for approaching the difficult question of the melting pot, even comparing it to international concerns: “A burning issue in the field of sociology... be it the black problem or another racial issue in America, Mexico or South Africa.”¹⁸ One of the period’s more outspoken critics, Baruch Kurzweil, on the other hand, felt that: “Her aim was good and worthy but her artistic abilities were not sufficient to truly shape the problem.”¹⁹ Some critics emphasized the ideological aspects in the novel: “We follow her story spell-bound. She knows how to tell the legend of our war into which the Sepahrdi Avram is thrown.”²⁰ Most of the reviewers, however, focused on the young writer’s inexperience and immature writing. Shai Penueli felt the need to “judge the

¹⁶ Dan Miron, *Hakoah haḥalash* [The Weak Strength] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2002) 26-45; Nitza ben Dov, "Bema'ale hamadregot hayordot" [Up the Downward Steps], *Haaretz (Sfarim)* 15 Sept. 1999: 6; Yizhak Laor, "Reḥov hamadregot ḥ ozer shenit" [The Street of Steps Returns Again], *Haaretz (Art & Culture)* 27 Nov. 1998: B13.

¹⁷ “The Asher Barash Prize for Yehudit Hendel,” *Dvar Hapoelet* June 1954.

¹⁸ Avraham Blat, "The Street of Steps," *Hatzofe* 28 Oct. 1955: 5.

¹⁹ Baruch Kurtzweil, "New Themes in the Israeli Story," *Haaretz* 20 July 1956.

²⁰ "Reḥov hamadregot " [Street of Steps], *Dvar Hapoelet* Sept. 1955.

author for not making her story bigger as the subject rightfully demands,” but acknowledged the fact that those same minor characters reside “in a man’s heart and a secret covenant is formed with them.”²¹ Others saw the residents of the street as “a human problem, a victim of a double tragedy.”²² Hendel’s writing was sometimes compared to Haim Hazaz or Yehuda Burla, but she usually suffered from such comparisons since: “In Burla there is healthy primariness, fertile vitality. In Hendel, innocence bordering on childishness.”²³ Similarly, a well-known writer like Gershon Shoffman intertwined praise and criticism, writing that “the essential melody, that is the gentle spiritual embroidery which binds every line, every sentence, is what lessens the hurdles of length, detail, and repetition.”²⁴ Much like what we have witnessed in the previous chapters, Hendel’s work was also described as lacking a real story “since it [Hendel’s book] is missing such a plot and since there is no present time in it, nothing happens.”²⁵ One of the only reviewers to mark Hendel’s novel as a work of some importance was Hillel Barzel, stating that: “Several characteristics determine a special place for Yehudit Hendel’s *The Street of Steps* and award it great significance.”²⁶ But even he concludes that “the writer’s observation skills surpass her

²¹ Shai Penueli, "The Street of Steps," *Al Hamishmar* 5 Aug. 1955.

²² Yaakov Malkin, "Reḥ ov hamadregot" [Street of Steps], *Masa* 22 July 1955.

²³ S.Sagiv, "Mehatzipor hashḥ ora latzipor hakehula" [From the Black Bird to the Blue Bird], *Haboker* 29 Jul. 1955.

²⁴ Gershon Shoffman, "Two-Three Lines," *Davar* 14 Jun. 1955.

²⁵ Malkin, *Masa*.

²⁶ Hillel Barzel, "Aliot umoradot berḥ ov hamadregot" [Ups and Downs on the Street of Steps], *Haaretz* 31 May 1956.

ability of intellectual discussion.”²⁷ Interestingly, unlike other writers at the time (like Moshe Shamir and Yigal Mossenson) Hendel’s novel failed as a play and the critics called it “a boring theatrical ‘alley’.”²⁸

In contrast to the readings of Eytan, Schwartz, and Kahana in the previous chapter, Hendel’s novel seems to be valued by its themes, whereas her style and writing skill are often questioned by the critics. Unlike other authors examined in this study, Hendel’s reviews, except for one or two, hardly contain any feminine adjectives and images that portray her writing. As she is also a woman-writer publishing in the same period we would have to assume that what makes Hendel different here is her choice of the leading protagonist. Apparently, women were reviewed through gender lenses when writing about women, but were perhaps more easily accepted when choosing male-characters. In Hendel’s case she chose a minor male protagonist who puts her writing, together with her first book, in a niche that did not threaten or resist the *Palmach* generation’s canonized writing at the time, probably because much of her critique went unnoticed.

Some of these (mis)readings were corrected by contemporary scholarship. Hendel was one of the few women authors included in Shaked’s renowned *History of Hebrew Fiction*. *The Street of Steps* is described there as "a clear example of a social novel that is also lyric-impressionistic,"²⁹ Shaked also suggested that Hendel’s first

²⁷ Barzel, "Aliot umoradot."

²⁸ A. Dolev, "The Street of Steps," *Maariv* 22 Oct. 1959.

²⁹ Shaked, *Hasiporet* Vol. 4 121.

book already marked her move to the next generation of writers (the state generation). In 1992, Dan Miron devoted an entire book to Hendel's opus in his 1992 *Hakoah ha'halash* [The Weak Power]. He notes that "Hendel, who wrote her novel at the historical-cultural moment when the young Israeli literature and culture turned from the Military atmosphere of struggle... [to] the social Israeli landscape with its contrasts and gaps, provided in her writing the depth and complexity of this shift."³⁰ In 1994 Pnina Shirav analyzed *The Street of Steps* in her work on three major Israeli women writers and the manner in which they represent the feminine experience in their works. In her book, Shirav describes *The Street of Steps* as a novel which "reflects the social and ideological crisis experienced by Israeli society after the War of Independence."³¹ The novel itself was republished in 1998 and again received welcoming reviews in the press. Nitza ben Dov described Hendel's writing as "fresh" even after 40 years. Yitzhak Laor, however, perceived the main love story as "the ideological need of the author to 'mate' a black man and white woman."³² Regardless, Yehudit Hendel was not only the most successful writer of the group discussed here, but she was (as well as Naomi Fraenkel to some extent) the only one to keep writing, maintaining a thriving career including six novels and four short-story collections as well as non-fiction works.

³⁰ Miron, *Hakoah* 27.

³¹ Pnina Shirav, *Ktiva lo tama* [Non Innocent Writing] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1998) 60.

³² Laor, black of course in the ethnic sense.

THE CARTOGRAPHY OF HIGH AND LOW

The novel's first segment, titled "Lanterns in the Rain," maps the two major poles of the work. After the first two chapters' introduction to the street of steps, we move up to the Carmel, where we're introduced to Ella, Ram's girlfriend, whose point of view takes up most of the last portion of the novel. A resident of the upper city and the daughter of a successful contractor, Ella represents everything that Ram lacks: confidence, friends, money and education. An only daughter, she is the center of both her father and grandfather's lives (just like Ram, her mother died when she was little), but also of her social circle, where many of Ram's old *Palmach* buddies compete for her attention.³³ We first see her surrounded by these suitors in the local café: "Her lips wore a feeble, mocking smile, between bursts of boisterous laughter" (34; 40). Nicknamed by Ram's uncle Ovadia as, "the yellow haired," her blonde hair and fair complexion serve as a consistent synecdoche of her character. Thus, Ram and Ella serve, on the surface, as complete opposites of each other. The dark, silent Sephardi man versus the blonde, privileged Ashkenazi girl; their only shared territory was the war, but even there Ram is committed to the memories of the dead while Ella remembers moments of elation: "She never knew that she had such strength, such ignorance of fatigue, such ennobling desires" (287; 335). A closer reading of the novel

³³ This connection has been widely discussed by Pnina Shirav who associates the "absent mother" syndrome with the social reality portrayed in the novel, focusing mostly on questions of class and ethnicity. My analysis, by contrast, will highlight gender and nation as key aspects in Hendel's novel. Shirav, *Ktiva* 60-68.

indicates, however, that the two share more than the national narrative. In fact, I will argue that Ella serves more as Ram's reflection—in what could have been his fate—than his beloved. The latter role belongs, surprisingly, to Ram's brother, Nissim, whose effeminate depiction in the novel both renders him the stereotypical role of a woman as well as challenges Ram's seemingly blunt masculinity. But before we can further examine this unusual role reversal we first need to establish Hendel's unique account of the Zionist dream and its aftermath.

Although Ram is the clear protagonist of *The Street of Steps*, the novel's rich variety of characters creates a work of pastiche rather than a linear *Bildungsroman*.³⁴ In true Bakhtinian fashion Hendel's novel allows for different, contradicting voices which often compete and overpower one another and even the narrator in their quest for an authoritative narrative, a quest which utterly fails in the novel. By adopting Bakhtin's strategy of polyphony Hendel was able to demonstrate variety not only in modes of speech but also in opinions, backgrounds, and values. Thus, this was not merely a stylistic technique, as we shall see, but a thematic one as well. While these characters reappear throughout the novel they play a significant part in the second section titled simply "Avram," offering a short biography of the Sephardi boy who became a war hero. In fact, as we will see, Ram's family members, his girlfriend and her family, as well as other "types" Hendel positions in the alleys of the neighborhood, serve a key role in both highlighting Ram's own complex positioning within the

³⁴ Similarly, Hendel's first book, the short story collection *Anashim aḥerim hem* has dealt mostly with marginal characters in Israeli society.

family, state, and national narrative and as alternative options to Zionist role models. The Bachar family stands out as a patriarchal all-male unit. Ram lives with his father, an unsuccessful vendor, his invalid brother Nissim and his drunken uncle Ovadia. His mother, a dreamy, fragile figure who died at a young age, surfaces in the novel only in painful flashbacks. The love-object of both the father and the uncle, her death paralyzed the family: “Their father looked around him with empty eyes, like a blind man. He did not open his mouth, as if he were thunderstruck. And Ovadia wandered around the streets, day after day” (80; 93). Pnina Shirav claims that the absence the mother in the novel is a “symbolic archetypical element which acts in the work as a diagnosis of the state of [this] generation—an orphaned generation.”³⁵ Nevertheless, as often stressed in theories of nationalism, it is this same missing mother that first planted the national cause in Ram’s mind and the one who appoints him as a savior of his people: “You’ll do something for the Jewish people. God send me this dream. And you’ll be strong” (74; 84). Other characters include Ram’s close neighbor and bereaved mother, Malka; Mussa the devious merchant who lures the street’s women with the shiny fabrics he sells; and Ram’s father with his endless card games. Mussa’s daughter Rivka is Ram’s childhood sweetheart who tries to win back the young man’s heart. Like her father she resorts to flashing new dresses and dangling earrings that “drive the boys crazy” (109; 128). With her dark, sensual appearance and her childish naiveté Rivka bluntly represents Ella’s complete opposite in the novel. Yet beyond

³⁵ Shirav, *Ktiva* 64.

this dichotomy she is also the stereotypical figure of the Other, native woman—a dark mixture of overt sexuality and primitivism which threatens Ella as she notes to herself that Rivka "was pretty, but broad in the hips...and ridiculously made up" (168; 198). Ironically, she is nicknamed "the black sweet bird" by Ovadia but in fact she is chained to the street of steps, and unlike Erella, who ventures in and out of the neighborhood, she can only wait for Ram's return.

In *The Street of Steps* Yehudit Hendel draws a clear cartography of high and low. Dan Miron characterizes the novel as aligned on two axes: the horizontal and the vertical. The latter is the one between the lower street and the upper hills of the Carmel where the Ashkenazi elite resides. This vertical active axis—on which the different characters move back and forth—is the more noticeable one. But according to Miron, the more interesting, and perhaps more finely drawn axis, is the horizontal one. On it, we find passive, stationary characters like Ram's father and uncle, but also Nissim and Malka. They represent what Miron terms "the static option" in the novel with no real aspiration to "move up" whether literally or metaphorically. These characters have accepted their social positioning whether by choice like Nissim, or out of anger like the father. In fact, Nissim becomes what Miron calls "the 'philosopher' of the passive-horizontal option as it evolves in *The Street of Steps*."³⁶ This "philosophy" can be summarized in Nissim's following words: "You think the street is

³⁶ Miron, *Hakoah* 30.

more interesting than what I can see through my window? The life of the street can be seen very well from here” (66; 77).

Nissim’s position by the window is reminiscent of a familiar cultural feminine location. Women gazing out from windows or doorsteps are a well known image in ancient as well as modern art.³⁷ While in antiquity this position sometimes signified “the essence of her femininity, her sexual availability and her fecundity,” in our time it became a symbol of confinement and oppression.³⁸ Women behind windows are locked in their domestic sphere and are only allowed to look out from afar on what takes place in the public male domain. Thus, they are both unable to participate in the political, social, and ideological realms that are engulfed in this public sphere and are presented as a spectacle for those gazing at them from outside. Such images were also apparent in biblical stories, as Nehama Aschkenasi conveys, where a woman cannot “forget that the position ‘at the window’ meant her removal from the male world of politics and history.”³⁹ Although Aschkenasi presents some surprising tales of gender transcendence and women’s rebellion against this enforced tradition, for most female biblical characters: “Spatial constriction implies temporal narrowness as well and highlights biblical women’s marginality in time.”⁴⁰ Nissim’s location, however, is not necessarily a result of hegemonic demands. In contrast with the biblical and modern

³⁷ See for example Carla Gottlieb, *Window in Art: Fom the Window of God to the Vanity of Man* (New York: Abaris Books, 1981).

³⁸ Aschkenasi, *Woman at the Window* 14.

³⁹ Aschkenasi *Woman* 15.

⁴⁰ Aschkenasi *Woman* 16.

woman, Nissim's chosen seclusion, as we shall see, becomes a source of power undermining stereotypical feminine gender roles.

Thus, as mentioned earlier, the minor characters serve a two-fold purpose in the novel. On the one hand they emphasize Ram's own inner crisis and serve as an acute reminder of his socio-economic limitations. But more importantly, the novel's subtle subversive tone lies in this option, where those who have taken themselves out of the Zionist narrative and decided to live their lives alongside it, reside. "In this sense *The Street of Steps* holds an ideological heresy that was even 'dangerous' in the atmosphere and conditions of the 1950s...Hendel discreetly undermined the public ethic structure of the Ben Gurionist Israel...through characters like Malka and Nissim she doubts the very relevancy of ideological judgment."⁴¹

NATIONAL MOTHERHOOD

Indeed, Malka's story in the novel posits an alternative voice in to the Zionist account. Ram's next door neighbor, who takes care of the family men, is also a bereaved mother who lost her only son in the war. Ram was the one to deliver the news to her and apparently never tells her the full story: "He told me so much, but he didn't tell me the whole truth. He was hiding something" (12; 13), she complains. What Ram, as the representative of the patriarchal ruling ideology, doesn't tell her she

⁴¹ Miron is referring here to the "melting pot" policy conducted by the Ben Gurion government during the 1950s which preached assimilation of Jewish immigrants from different countries, especially Sephardi Jews; Sabra Miron, *Hakoah* 40-41.

needs to tell and retell herself. Malka's story serves as an underlying frame to the novel, not only because Hendel chose to open and close the work with this character, but also because she repeatedly tells the same story of her son's death: "Everyone's tired of my story, but who can I tell it to every day?" (191; 223). Interestingly, as one of the only present mothers in the story her motherhood is incomplete and thus underlines what Shirav sees as "a metaphor for the disruption of Israeli society after the War of Independence as seen in the novel—the inability to commune, to become a people."⁴² Like Ram and Ella who have lost their mother and search for replacement in the national cause, Malka fails to find her answer in Ram's story and needs to reenact her son's death to prevent it from becoming meaningless. For Malka, the national narrative is meaningless. She operates outside it, not only because she is relegated to its margins, but also as a form of protest. According to the Zionist ethos, the bereaved mother has to demonstrate restraint and courage in dealing with her private loss—appropriated by the national commemoration—by integrating "her horrible experience within a large continuum of salvation and redemption, one which has a clear political dimension."⁴³ As Hannah Naveh has shown in her work on Israeli grief and mourning: "The official mourning pattern is a chapter in the repertoire of the patriarchal establishment...the rhetoric of the public sphere shuns the personal voice and its subversive character; the ethos of the public sphere rejects the naked emotion,

⁴² Shirav *Ktiva* 63.

⁴³ Dan Miron, *Mul ha'ah hashotek* [Facing the Silent Brother] (Jerusalem: Open University Press and Keter, 1992) 142.

the addiction to it and the irrational element [of it].”⁴⁴ Thus, Malka's obsessive talk threatens this hegemony. By refusing to adhere to the silent, proud, grieving figure of the bereaved mother assigned to her by the national discourse, and by endlessly repeating her story, she, in fact, defies it.

SPEAKING THE STREET

Malka's repetitive story sheds light on another important aspect of Hendel's novel—its language. Much like Rachel Eytan in *The Fifth Heaven*, Hendel pays close attention to vocabulary, tone and dialect, producing not only an authentic depiction of speech styles, but also a clear categorization of the street and its inhabitants. Thus, "language becomes the medium through which a hierarchal structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth', 'order', and 'reality' become established.”⁴⁵ All the characters residing on the street, including Ram, speak a colloquial Hebrew with clear syntactic and grammatical mistakes, often omitting prepositions or pronouns. “I'm takin' me a bag of bread and stayin' on the fence” (165; 193), says the little boy Ella meets on the street, while Ovadia describes Malka as the one who “cooks for other people...and don't eat” (171; 201). Although many of them were already born on the street or have lived in Israel for many years, theirs is still not standard or proper Hebrew. If, as Michel Foucault asserts, language,

⁴⁴ Hannah Naveh, *Beshevi ha'evel* 147.

⁴⁵ Bill Aschroft et al., eds., *The Empire Writes* 7.

as foundation of any discourse, is power—the power to name and possess—then its lack seemingly turns these inhabitants to those ruled by others.

Nevertheless, as Foucault points out, discourse is also where power and knowledge meet and thus: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it."⁴⁶ Hence, the fragmented Hebrew “dialect” used by the residents of the street can be seen as distorting and disturbing the national, hegemonic flow, their lexicon as resisting and rejecting the national jargon, an insider's code that shuts the others out. This code is emphasized in the third section of the novel titled “Open Courtyards,” as Ella offers a countermove within the novel’s cartography and goes downtown to look for Ram and discover the street of steps for herself. As she encounters Ovadia, Malka, Rivka and others, her Hebrew almost immediately adjusts to complement theirs marking her more of an outsider than she meant. When Ovadia tells her of a heat wave she says (using the term he just taught her) “think sirocco coming?” (181; 212). When he is shocked to learn she cannot cook, she awkwardly offers “can learn” (173; 203). Notably, this usage of language as an act of resistance can also be found in the works

⁴⁶ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 101. Foucault uses discourse rather fluidly, "treating it sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualisable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements." Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972) 80.

of Mizrahi writers during the 1960s as well as women throughout the history of modern Hebrew literature.⁴⁷

ASHKENAZI/SEPAHRDI DICHOTOMY

The frantic movement of Ram and Ella up and down the Carmel draws an urban binary that is further reflected in the human one. This duality, however, has deeper roots in the history of Jewish culture. In "The Place in Post-Classic Hebrew Literature" Yigal Schwartz describes the two dominant spheres of the old Jewish town in the *Haskalah* literature.⁴⁸ The Jewish section, according to Schwartz, is "narrow, low, dark and dirty" while the Gentile is "wide, high, well-lit and clean."⁴⁹ Citing Michah Yosef Berdichevski's story "Me'ever lanahar" [Without Hope], Schwartz describes a movement of Jews traveling from the center of the Jewish sphere to the

⁴⁷ For some examples see Tova Cohen, "Betokh hatarbut" 69-110; Chaya Shacham, *Nashim umasekhot*; and Feldman "A People that Dwells." On Mizrahi writers see Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 220-275; Hannan Hever, "Lo banu min hayam" [We Didn't Come From the Sea], *Mizrahim in Israel: A Critical Observation into Israel's Ethnicity*, eds. Hannan Hever et al. (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute/ Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2002) 191-212; and Shimrit Peled, "Nefil muvas benof h' asar tslalim: mizrah' iut, ashkenaziut vemerh' av baroman hayisraeli leah' ar milh' emet 1967" [A Defeated Giant in a Shadowless Landscape: Mizrahi, Ashkenazi and Space in the Israeli Novel post-1967], *Te'oria ubikoret* 29 (Fall 2006): 149-172.

⁴⁸ Yigal Schwartz, "Mah' shevet hamakom basiporet ha'ivrit habatar klasit" [The Place in Post-Classic Hebrew Literature], *Hevra ve sifrut* [Literature and Society in Modern Hebrew Culture: Papers in Honor of Gershon Shaked], eds. Judith Bar-el, Yigal Schwartz and Tamar S. Hess (Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Keter Publishing: Tel Aviv, 2000): 455-468.

⁴⁹ Schwartz 457.

peripheries where they are in contact with others, and after going back and forth they finally remain in the non-Jewish sphere. While in Berdichevski's story it is the Gentile section of the town that is bright and inviting, in Hendel's novel it is the territory of the bourgeois Ashkenazi Jews. "There are lights in the display windows, tiny mysterious lights on candy boxes and illuminated motion-picture marquees. The girls wear floral print dresses and ribbons, and there are large houses with curtains" (72; 83). In an interesting inversion, what before marked Jewish identity now makes up the Sephardi one, while the new (Israeli) Jews function like the non-Jews in the old *shtetl*. Thus, this dichotomy of light versus dark evolves and changes within Jewish history. First, we have the familiar Zionist national ethos where the new Jews erase the image of the old Jews and with it embrace the face of their previous oppressors. In it, "the new image of the Jew, as imagined by Zionism, was a male Christian-like figure."⁵⁰ Then, in the newly established state the different Jewish minorities—Sephardi Jews and later Mizrahim, Holocaust survivors and of course women—now play the role of the Other. Edward Said described this type of relationship as taking place between two poles, their encounter dominated by "flexible, positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand."⁵¹ Ultimately, caught in this dichotomy, Ram faces two choices. He can either play a second violin in the Ashkenazi middle-class world

⁵⁰ Talila Kush-Zohar, "Mitos hatsabarit" [The Myth of the Woman Sabra], diss., Tel Aviv University, 1999, 7.

⁵¹ Said, *Orientalism* 7.

where he will be forever looked down upon, or he can go back to the street of steps and remain there among his own thus choosing Nissim's "static philosophy." As we will soon see, Hendel's protagonist manages to carve for himself a new route, one that symbolizes both escape and a bold defiance against the Zionist ethos. Yet before we can examine Ram's "third route" outside of the Ashkenazi/Sephardi dichotomy, we must stop to include here another dimension of the move Hendel delineates—namely the question of gender and how it underscores the national and ethnic narratives.

GENDER ROLE REVERSAL

Although *The Street of Steps* foregrounds a traditional love story between a working-class hero and a well-off princess, its subtext reveals a far more complex picture. While the novel revolves around the couple's meetings, their conflicts with others and their memories of each other and of past lives, in the end it seems as though both protagonists give up on one another. While Ram heads back to the sea, Erella prepares herself for mourning like she did over her former (dead) boyfriend. But a closer reading of the novel suggests that apart from the love-story axis, drawn between the Carmel Mountain and the downtown neighborhood, another dotted line is subtly sketched between Ram and his brother. The triangle created illustrates the two directions facing Ram in 1950s Israel, and within it Hendel experiments both with gender roles and with a critique of the national story.

One side of this triangle is represented by Ella. Even though she is assigned the traditional role of the hero's beloved, Ella's character constructed with stereotypically national-male components. In fact, she is the emblem of the ideal *sabra*:

Her face was narrow, sunburned, with a fairness beneath a deep, radiant tan, and there was sun in the tan. When she laughed, her face appeared even narrower, the cheekbones protruded charmingly, and the head moved sensuously under its crown of very pale blond hair, quite unruly, quite disheveled, rarely combed, but very blond, and as if it had a life of its own (44; 51).⁵²

Unlike other women protagonists in the Palmach literature, who were often appointed the roles of mothers or girlfriends who stay behind; Ella is very much present in the public sphere and even dares to defy her father when she joins the Palmach against his wishes.⁵³ Ella, in fact, serves as what Ram's future could have looked like were he born on the right side of the city. According to the cartography of the novel Ella is the one who is positioned on the upper level and it is Ram who needs to reach her every time. In the end, Ella is the one who gives up on Ram and, as Dan Miron points out, she does so by comparing their separation to the death of her former boyfriend—Raffi—during the war. “The reason for returning to Raffi does not depend only on the regression to the state of mourning...” but also, writes Miron, “[on] the need for consolation hidden in Raffi's loss. He is dead and maybe Avram will ‘die’ as far as she is concerned and she will survive this recent death as she did the

⁵² For popular quotes on the Sabra's unruly hair and a sunburned face compare with Almog, 326-328.

⁵³ See Talilah Kush-Zohar, "Hi lo halkha basadot" [She Did Not Walk in the Fields] *Sadan* Vol.5,304-346.

previous.”⁵⁴ But while Miron sees Ella’s stance as a sign of weakness, her farewell grief as analogous to Avram’s choice of running away to the sea, I claim this weakness is in fact her choice of the national narrative over the personal. When she contemplates her life and her love for Ram, she immediately turns to analyze it through this prism, thus evoking her previous romantic experience which was also colored by the war. Thus, she reflects on their first meeting at the birth of his dead friend’s son, as Ram came to announce the death to the mother: “Avram’s face rose before her as she saw him at first, pale, looking at her as if she were a revelation from out of the darkness. Nothing was strange to her then. The mist on the water. The lights that hit the Sea of Galilee like lightning” (291; 340). For Ella, their stormy love affair reflected the turbulent national events, thus deeming their separation necessary according to the narrative of the war romance. Although she defies, and sometimes inverts gender stereotypes throughout the novel, Ella’s character adopts the position of the mourning girlfriend back home, seemingly obeying the traditional discourse of war. But in fact, if we carefully examine the last pages of the novel where Ella and Ram finally pave new routes, a different story emerges. True to her masculine figure, Ella, like Moshe Shamir’s Uri, prefers the glory of death, or in her case, mourning, to a complex relationship, one that might overshadow her socio-national position.⁵⁵ Since women’s national location is always ambivalent, in order to fully identify herself as a

⁵⁴ Miron, *Hakoah* 42.

⁵⁵ See Shamir for comparison. Moshe Shamir, *Hu halakh basadot* [He Walked in the Fields] (1947; Merhavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1966) 143, 305; see also discussion in Chapter 1.

national subject "[which is] a male privilege conditioned on being a man," she must distance herself from the (weaker) Sephardi man who drags her down the national hierarchy as constructed in the novel.⁵⁶ By negating her personal feelings Ella performs the *Palmach* tough Sabra image to its fullest.⁵⁷

But while Ella functions as Ram's national alter ego, the other side of the triangle is represented by Nissim who plays the part of the passive, longing beloved.⁵⁸ Much of the second chapter is devoted to Nissim and Avram's relationship as a core component in Avram's biography. Nissim is depicted as "young man with gentle eyes" (107; 126) who sits and waits by the window. It is Nissim, and not Rivka, who sees Ram off to war, among the other women on the platform "Nissim looked so tiny as the station drifted past" (90; 104). It is Nissim to whom Ram writes his letters from abroad and the one he longs for in those cold nights during the war. More importantly, Nissim is also present in Ram's thoughts when he is off to meet with Ella: "Avram was seized with wonder at himself for being about to marry Erella Dagan, while Nissim

⁵⁶ Tsamir, *Beshem hanof* 127.

⁵⁷ On the trial and tragedy of such choices see Yael Feldman's chapter on Netiva Ben Yehudah, the famous *Palmach* fighter who struggled with gender bias, in Feldman, *No Room* 177-192.

⁵⁸ Although I will not get into it here it is interesting to note a pattern that had already dominated the *Palmach* literature when Hendel published *The Street of Steps*. In countless novels published in the late 1940s and early 1950s we find the *Palmach* duo, the protagonist and his best friend who represent opposite characters. One is usually honest, straightforward and loyal, the other more rebellious and romantic, both vying for the same woman. More often than not these relationships appear to have a homoerotic underlining and are solved by the friend's death, a death which often paves the way to the beloved girl's heart. One such example can be found in Nathan Shaham's novel *Tamid Anaḥnu* [Always us] (Merḥ ahavia: Sifriat Poalim, 1952).

languished in the damp room on the Street of Steps” (32; 35); and it is Nissim in the end who truly stands between them. The question arises then, why would Hendel choose such a blunt role reversal and what does she achieve by doing so?

The answer lies within the general subversive streak that Miron highlights (although he addresses it only in the national realm). Were Nissim a woman, even Ram’s sister, his stereotypical depiction would not have raised any questions. But by gendering the brothers’ relationship in an unexpected way, Hendel emphasizes Nissim’s radical choices and forces her readers to acknowledge the acute differences in gender roles. Not only is Nissim a weak Sephardi man who resides, invalid, in the lowly street of steps, but he has also taken the female stance of the "beloved by the window" thus confining himself to a life on the very brinks of the chauvinist male-Zionist margins. The clear gender implications of this choice will be discussed next.

The two options, Nissim versus Ella finally meet and collide in the fourth and longest segment of the novel, “Open Courtyards”. Interestingly, it is Ella who blurs the boundaries by crossing over. She tells herself she is looking for Ram, but essentially she is looking to finally familiarize herself with the world of her beloved. This strange, almost exotic place indeed appears as completely different from her privileged yet lonely upbringing: "What did Avram do if he sometimes wished to be alone? There everything was open, people moved about all day without having to open the door and if a person wanted to hide it would be difficult: and all day long the sounds of the street were heard inside the house" (277-8; 322). While she has long

conversations with Ovadia and briefly encounters other residents, it is her meeting with Nissim that highlights the two poles of Ram's life. On the one hand, Ella feels as though she has finally found the missing piece of Ram's puzzle. When she meets Nissim, "somehow she felt very close to him and this was a sharp feeling of relationship, one that she had never had with Avram." (254; 294). In fact, Nissim, with his gentle beauty that Ella notices time and again throughout the chapter, and his passive stance, serves much more as Ella's "other half" than Ram. On the other hand, he is quick to redraw the boundaries between their two worlds and when he asks her: "Do you think that it's possible to separate life and fate in thought?" she soon realizes that "Nissim had said that about himself, and not about her love for Avram. He was referring to his own life, to his street, and perhaps to Ovadia" (254; 294).

"Open Courtyards" is also the only chapter in which we hear Nissim's thoughts and it is no coincidence that they are placed within Ella's journey and right before her long stream-of-consciousness section that opens the last segment of the novel. The fact that we hear Nissim's voice here allows us to contrast their narratives as both think back on the war: Ella reminisces on a time of elation (as quoted earlier) while Nissim revisits his fears:

His thoughts reverted to that night on the mountain, in the cave. Morning was already dawning gray before his eyes when he awoke and felt a terrible chill shoot through his body. His senses cleared momentarily, and he thought that his comrades would come back and pick him up and that he would not die...The wind whistled through the rocks, and he imagined that the entire mountain was but a road on which he, Nissim, was lying. His body seemed very heavy and strong, even though he could not move. How afraid he had been. They would

come in the morning to pick him up. Yes, he didn't think then that he would die. He knew he wouldn't die. The strangeness started only afterward (243; 288).

While Ella recites the camaraderie of war, Nissim, by repeating again and again that his friends would come back for him expresses exactly the opposite. Even though he was saved, Nissim is all but alienated from society while Ella thrives in the post-war years.

By endowing both Nissim and Ella with gender traits of the opposite sex Hendel seems to employ both irony and criticism as she exposes gender stereotypes and their deep affiliation with national identity.⁵⁹ In the social hierarchy illustrated by the novel, ethnic identity comes in last while the national component seemingly overrides all others (seemingly because as soon as the war is over so are the advantages of those who fight in its name). However, just as importantly, the national model genders this hierarchy so that those at the top are masculine (also physically located there, as is the case with Ella), and those at the bottom are more and more feminized. Thus, Nissim, a man who has participated in the war is necessarily feminized through his ethnic origin. Therefore, when Nissim experiences the world outside through the mitigation of the window, through a stereotypically female enclosure, the position appointed to him within the national structure of power is radicalized by Hendel. Nissim's position inside means he is bluntly erased out of the Zionist narrative. In "Derekh qotzim" [Thorne Road] Dvora Baron's short story from

⁵⁹ See my detailed discussion in Chapter 3 and see also McClintock 1997; Tsamir 2006; and Gluzman 2007.

1911, Mosha, a paralyzed young woman, sits at the window and watches the world outside as the people in the small Jewish town around her rebel against the very existence of this semi-alive creature. Orly Lubin writes about the power employed by Mosha's gaze which forces others to look at her as "the paralysis is a kind of silent rebellion against her expulsion from the public sphere as a woman not worthy of equal partnership in it."⁶⁰ Thus, Nissim's gaze undermines the stare of the community outside, preventing it from construing both his national and gender identities.⁶¹

BACK TO THE SEA

In 1954 Yigal Mossenson's play *Kazablan* was successfully performed on the Israeli stage.⁶² The play starts off as a detective story where a friend of Kazablan, the protagonist, has been stabbed and the attacker's identity remains unknown. It then quickly takes a melodramatic turn in which the charismatic character of Kazablan, the handsome, bad-tempered Moroccan street leader (and a former war hero), fights for the future of his poor Jaffa neighborhood. Kazablan's blood-thirsty character—he is often carrying a knife or referring to one in his monologues—his grammatically incorrect Hebrew, and his almost aggressive courtship of an Ashkenazi girl, imprinted

⁶⁰ Lubin 157.

⁶¹ A similar move can be found in Hendel's early short-story collection *They are Different*, where "the 'us' becomes them and vice versa, a move which renders the relation between center and margin completely relative." Shirav, *Ktiva* 53.

⁶² Interestingly enough, Mossenson's play and Hendel's novel were published in the same year.

Mizrahi stereotypes more than challenged them.⁶³ In the end “Kazablan’s limited skills allow him only one of two options: laborious construction work or crime.”⁶⁴ Much like Ram, he too refuses the Zionist possibility, (in his case joining a border-settlement); he remains in his old Jaffa neighborhood. Twelve years later, the play became a musical and later a successful film. In these versions the grim ending turned light by adopting the ultimate comedy resolution of a wedding not only between the Sephardi man and the Ashkenazi girl, but also between their different communities who now truly experience the gayety of the melting pot dream. For Yehudit Hendel's *The Street of Steps* characters, such effortless bliss is not within reach. Thus, not only does “sadness colors their being,” as one reviewer noted, they also embody within them the different levels on which nation, gender and ethnicity constantly collide.⁶⁵ In “The Morrow”, the short chapter which ends the novel, Hendel positions Ram and Ella as two characters in a play, moving, again, in opposite directions. Ella searches for Ram at the port's dark bars while he goes to her house and confronts her father for the last time. This time, however, they make a shift in their movement, one which will finally change the novel’s course. Ella goes back to her roots reminiscing on childhood memories and surprisingly rediscovering her affinity to her father: “A sudden affection for Dad crept over her stealthily, flowed into her body in a thin, sharp stream...Dad had never been too hard on her, he never imposed his will on her, and he

⁶³ Dan Oryan, "The Birth of the Moroccan Stereotype in the Israeli Theater," *Bama*, vol. 34 (2000): 47-68.

⁶⁴ Oryan 49.

⁶⁵ Hillel Barzel, "Ups and Downs."

behaved toward her as he did toward himself—with a cool reserve” (286; 333-334). On the other side of town Ram rejoins the cargo ship, choosing the path of the sea. This is the sea that leads the Jews to their land, the sea out of which Shamir’s *sabras* are born—but Hendel’s hero sails in it in the opposite direction, breaking free from national boundaries. This dramatic separation of the two lovers is further stressed by the seemingly quiet undertone on which the novel ends. In the last pages we follow Nissim and Malka as they go about their day in the same monotonous routine they have always kept, trapped forever in their position as the weakest residents of the street, yet quietly reiterating their muted stories.⁶⁶

THE RETURN OF THE REPRESSED: *Lovers’ Bread*

Much like Yehudit Hendel’s Ram, Reuven Rimon, Shoshana Shrir’a’s protagonist is also a young man who struggles with his sense of identity. Reuven’s crisis stems from the conflict between his new national-Israeli self and his Jewish heritage from the Diaspora. Born in Poland, he immigrates to Palestine in the 1930s and sets out to build his future in the new homeland. During the stormy period of the *Yishuv*, a time when national aspirations, traditional gender roles and former identities collide, Reuven Reininger—now Rimon—does not easily fit into any of the Zionist narrative’s familiar “types”. He is neither an underground fighter nor a farmer or a

⁶⁶ Interestingly, five years after the novel was published the first Mizrahi upheaval broke out in Haifa in what became known as the Wadi Salib protests during which a drunk resident was shot by Police, leading to a series of violent demonstrations of Mizrahi Jews against their ethnic discrimination in 1950s Israel.

kibbutz member.⁶⁷ Unlike most literary heroes of this period (as featured first in the works of the *Palmach* generation), Reuven Rimon is a small time business owner, setting letters to print in a working-class Tel Aviv neighborhood.⁶⁸ “The son of a hybrid generation, an intermediate generation that arrived in the country in its youth rather than childhood” (118), Reuven’s figure stands for an almost forgotten age group within the literary landscape of the period, torn between its past and present.⁶⁹ Reuven’s love-hate relationship with the model of the new Jewish man, ultimately leading to his denial of it, exposes the greatest sin possible within this discourse—the maintenance of the diasporic narrative and with it the subversion of the Zionist project. *Lovers’ Bread* is constructed in light of this struggle as a journey Reuven takes, both mentally and physically, in search of a mystery woman, his perfect romantic match, but also a passage to his new country and his own place in it. An anti-hero in his submissive demeanor and his apologetic manner, it is Reuven Rimon, of all people, who offers through this voyage a crucial look at the new state and with it a critical examination of the national narrative. This journey, much like the ones depicted in *The Street of Steps*, underscores the movement offered by the novel from a

⁶⁷ For a comprehensive compilation of the different characterizations of the *sabra* image (as a fighter, farmer etc.) see Almog, *Hatsabar*.

⁶⁸ His character can be said to be reminiscent of the typical “Jewish” characters that often invade the works of Mendele and Haim Hazaz.

⁶⁹ Not coincidentally this is Shrirra’s generation as will be discussed next. Shoshana Shrirra, *Lehem ha’ohavim* [Lovers Bread] (Tel Aviv: Massada, 1957). All translations hereafter are mine.

cohesive national consciousness to a more complex, fragmented collage of the new Israeli nation.

Shoshana Shrirra's work has, until recently, received little scholarly attention both when first published and in later historiographies of Hebrew literature. Thus, she is merely footnoted in Shaked's comprehensive *Modern Hebrew Fiction* and her work appears only in one literary anthology of the 1950s writers. Born in Poland in 1917, Shrirra, like Yizhar Smilanski (b.1916) “stood at an intersection where various routes of previous generations met, and many paths of new beginnings exist.”⁷⁰ Except that Shrirra, unlike Yizhar, remained on the margins of the new roads paved. Shrirra's family moved to Palestine when she was eight years old. In 1935 she moved to London to study literature and Psychology and began writing short stories. During WWII she came back to Palestine and started working as a journalist in *Haboker* newspaper. Her first story was published in 1937 and her first collection of short stories *The Green Nile*, in 1947. It received few reviews, most of them unenthusiastic. According to Shrirra: “The literary establishment of the time did not look well upon unrealistic stories and urged us to cheer up the spirit of the people.”⁷¹ As a young writer she was cultivated—and limited—by two powerful editors: Yitzhak Lamdan and Yaakov Cohen. In an autobiographical piece Shrirra recounts how she censored sentences she knew they wouldn't approve of, and how Lamdan published one of her stories in the

⁷⁰ See Shaked, *Hasiporet* Vol. 4 181.

⁷¹ Reuven Kritz, *Hasiporet shel dor hama'avak la'atzma'ut* [Hebrew Narrative Fiction of the Struggle for Independence Era] (Kiryat Motzkin: Pura Books, 1978) 238.

back of *Gilionot* (a literary magazine) because it was sensual rather than national.⁷²

Lovers' Bread was her first novel, published in 1957 and it won the Kessel literary Prize. The book was followed by her second novel *She'arei aza* [Gaza Gates; 1960], and more than 10 years later two more short-story collections and a children's book.

Shrira's first novel, *Lovers' Bread*, received few reviews. Much like Yehudit Hendel, Shirra's novel was also seen as aiming to feature: "the problem of the melting pot and its solution in the coupling of a veteran Polish immigrant and a Moroccan newcomer."⁷³ Reuven Rimon was thus depicted as "a good guy, one who fulfils all the duties of the struggle and defense, underground and *aliyah* as well as the War of Independence until he finally also realizes the *mitzvah* of the integration of exiles [*mizug galuiot*] and marries a Moroccan woman." Thus, Reuven is seen by the reviewers as a mere ideological, one-dimensional character, while Shirra's critique of the national narrative went unnoticed. Shirra's writing style was praised by one critic as deriving from ancient Jewish literatures, while another claimed that put together the different details and characters lack a coherent shape.⁷⁴ Significantly, he complains, the depictions of the "declaration of independence night and the independence day itself do not reflect the marks they have made on the Hebrew man in those two

⁷² Kritz, *Hasiporet* 239.

⁷³ Shai Penueli, "Leḥ em ha'ohavim" [Lovers' Bread], *Moznaim* (July 1958): 465-466.

⁷⁴ M. Avishai, "Al leḥ em ha'ohavim" [On Lovers' Bread], *Al Hamishmar* 14 March 1958.

events.”⁷⁵ Thus, Shrirá’s critical portrayal of the collective Zionist identity embattled by her protagonist is all but ignored by her contemporary reviewers.

One of the few critics who devoted time and space to Shrirá's work was Reuven Kritz, both in his *Hasiporet shel dor hama'avak la'atzma*’ut [Hebrew Narrative Fiction of the Struggle for Independence Era], and in the anthology he edited with his son *The Stories of the Kibbutz*.⁷⁶ Reading her first stories, Kritz notes that "Shrirá's 'patterns' are different from those common in the 'classic' War of Independence literature...there are hardly any stories of 'the general in the individual.'" At the same time he concludes: "It is difficult to define these stories."⁷⁷ In some of Shrirá's stories Kritz finds precursors to the literature of the state generation referencing Amos Oz’s *My Michael* and Amalia Kahana Carmon's early stories. In 2003 two of Shrirá's stories appeared in Yaffah Berlovitz’s *Tender Rib*. Shrirá's work is also mentioned in brief in Pnina Shirav's *Non Innocent Writing*, who discusses her works as part of the history of Hebrew women writers, and in Avner Holtzman and Talila Kush Zohar’s articles.⁷⁸ In 2004 some of her letters were published in *Haaretz* by her daughter. From these we learn of Shrirá’s life as a vibrant, active journalist (one of two women at the time), who was well acquainted with the literary scene of that period.

⁷⁵ Penueli 466.

⁷⁶ Reuven Kritz and Uri Kritz, *Sipurei hakibbutz*..

⁷⁷ Kritz, *Hasiporet* 241.

⁷⁸ Avner , “They Are Different People,” *Yad vashem Research Collection* 30 (2002): 271-293; Kush-Zohar, "Hi lo halkha" 304-346.

NATION AND EROS

Lovers' Bread opens with Reuven's usual round around town, his chats with the neighbors and his landlady and a trip to buy flowers. Reuven, we find out, longs for the company of a woman, but since he is alone he sends the flowers to his favorite poet sitting at a close-by café, a man he dares not approach. This short episode serves to illustrate Reuven's pitiful demeanor in the novel. In fact, when we are first introduced to Reuven, we are almost inclined to mock him. He often talks when no one wants to hear: "Soon Rimon feels that nobody is listening to what he says, and if they listen they do so without much passion, and he suspects that deep down they pray to themselves' I wish he would stop!'"(33). The ironic depiction of Reuven as a small-time worker whose neighbors think highly of, is also a reoccurring theme throughout the first part of the novel: "And this honor with which they treat the young Rimon is only because he meets many important people at his shop, writers, publishers, public figures and go-getters who seek to produce signs for the elections, book jackets, ads etc." (7). The narrator clearly colors Reuven's "importance" in sarcastic shades as we discover that all these eminent people come to him for minor services rather than meaningful discussions. While Reuven spends his days in the company of older people, who look up to him as a representative of the younger generation fighting for their future state, he justifies the opposite to himself: "He had an argument with himself since world war II, where he wasn't one of the volunteers because he was afraid for his shop and pitied his family who was annihilated in the Diaspora, he being

its last descendant” (64). Undoubtedly, Reuven Rimón is an anti-hero in the most subtle, even mundane manner—a tedious figure, a layman, a marginal character who neither defies the spirit of his times (as for example the protagonist of Pinchas Sadeh’s autobiographical *Life As a Parable*, 1958) nor adheres to it, at least not internally.

Not surprisingly, Reuven’s anemic personality is also reflected in his romantic life which, like all the other novels discussed here, is unmistakably related to his position within the national narrative. The flowers he buys at the beginning of the novel are intended in his mind for Atara, a “quick-on-her-feet sabra” (20) he meets at the house of relatives and whom he tries, quite unsuccessfully, to impress. In the following chapters we learn more and more about Reuven and Atara’s incompatibility which everyone notices including Reuven himself. As the national situation becomes tense, and war seems inevitable, Reuven’s awkward courtship bluntly ends when Atara quickly marries another man. Yoram Razi, the new husband, is the embodiment of national manhood—a *sabra* who returns from his agricultural studies abroad to defend his country and soon becomes a military leader: “[Atara] saw in him importance and greatness, the future defense minister of the state of Israel...everyone predicted great things for Razi, even though he didn’t continue with his studies, and nobody thought of asking him about his actions and clandestine affairs as though they were the very secrets of the state”(72).⁷⁹ Here, as in many places throughout the novel,

⁷⁹ Razi’s description matches the image of the stereotypical *Palmach* commander who would rather work the land but is quick to answer the national call to fight. For more on this image of the commander in the *Palmach* literature see Mishka Ben David,

we sense the irony of the narrator who seemingly describes Razi's past but also sneaks in judgments of his supposed aura. Furthermore, Shrirra's language, often reminiscent of Agnon (especially the psychological novels), adds to the ironic dimension, as Agnon himself was known as the master of ironic narrators.⁸⁰

By following this writing style, (both in lexicon and general writing tone), Shrirra manages to subtly criticize, through Reuven's eyes, the making of the new state. Yet because Reuven himself appears to be mocked by the omniscient narrator, this criticism remains almost blurred at times. As the novel progresses and Reuven comes to terms with his place in this new nation, these critical, sometimes subversive thoughts become more numerous, bolder, closer to the surface. Accordingly, the sarcastic tone of the omniscient narrator disappears as well and Reuven's figure stands on its own as the novel's leading critical voice. Nevertheless, when the political situation gets tense Reuven sees it as his one chance to finally make his mark in the Zionist endeavor and reclaim his manhood and begs Razi for a military post. Yet, once more Reuven shies away from danger and at his request he is posted to protect a clearly marginal site: "His neighbors are under fire in the range of snipers while his presence does not require any action, just sitting or lying down quietly" (80). Further emphasizing Reuven's lack of manly traits is a young woman who patrols with him, and who is depicted as masculine manly and rough: "A short-haired girl who in her

Mipleshet ad Ziklag [Readings of the War of Independence Novel] (Tel Aviv: Tarmil, 1990) 127-179.

⁸⁰ For more on Agnon's style see for example Gershon Shaked, *Omanut hasipur shel Agnon* [The Narrative Art of Sh.Y. Agnon] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim, 1976).

boyish clothes resembles a young fellow.” (80) Although the girl, Menuha, courts Reuven, the gender-role inversion, not unlike what happened with Atara, leads to an erotic freeze up.⁸¹

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the link between national incapacity and romantic impotence has already been explored in depth by writers preceding Shrira. This theme, also explored in Rachel Eytan’s *The Fifth Heaven* via Dov’s character, has a critical bearing on the writing of manhood in Shrira’s novel. Indeed, out of the different protagonists of Hebrew literature, it is the *talush* that resonates most in Reuven Rimon's character. His depiction as a pitiful, feeble man is strongly reminiscent of those lost Jewish young men who first struggled with nation and Eros in the Diaspora, usually failing miserably in both realms; those of them who then made it to Palestine arrived only to discover how misfit they are within this new environment, both nationally and sexually.⁸² Yet Reuven is missing the tragic element of most of these characters and while Shrira adopts this pathetic figure for similar purposes of social criticism as do writers like Brenner and Agnon, she delineates a

⁸¹ Michael Gluzman describes a similar case in Brenner’s *Breakdown and Bereavement*, see Gluzman, *Haguf hatzioni* 172.

⁸² There are numerous examples in the stories of the *Tehiyah* writers. Two particularly famous examples of such libidinal and national tensions are Yhezkel Hefetz in Brenner’s *Breakdown and Bereavement* (1920) and Shay Agnon’s Yitzhak Kumer in *Only Yesterday* (1945). For selected bibliography on this subject see for example Dov Sadan, *Bein din leheshbon* [Between Duty and Accountability] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1963) ; Dan Miron, *Haḥim be'apo shel hanetzah* [Posterity Hooked: The Travail and Achievement of Uri Nissan Gnessin] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1997); and Gershon Shaked, *Lelo motza* [No Way Out] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1973). For a discussion of their struggle with Eros and shame see Alan Mintz, *Banished from Their Father’s Table* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

different course for her protagonist, one which will offer him a form of solace. In addition, while the *talush* figures strove to find amends in the national format and failed, Reuven much like Hendel's Ram, does so on his own terms. At the height of the War of Independence and the declaration of the state he quickly draws away from the victorious new Israelis and sets out to reclaim his former—practically buried—identity based in the Diaspora. This identity is constantly, almost compulsively, resurrected by Reuven until he reconfigures a new conception of self.

RE-NARRATING DIASPORA

Early on in the novel it becomes clear that unlike Razi, the tough commander of few words, Reuven, is an obsessive storyteller who bores his friends, and mostly Atara, with endless tales.⁸³ But what does he talk about that drives them to such annoyance with him? “He wishes to speak to her about mother and father and a young brother, who remained abroad and no one knows what happened to them. Reuven wants to tell her of his childhood in his hometown, his early youth and his deeds there in the youth movement, of Bialik who came to his town” (24). Like Hendel's Malka, Reuven is almost doomed to repeat his story, his truth, and his identity again and again. During the pre-state era of the 1940s this reminiscing about parents, landscapes, and the old Jewish town was considered almost taboo: “The deeper the spiritual and institutional roots of the Zionist religion reached, the stronger the ethos of the negation

⁸³ While Reuven isn't particularly depicted as feminine in the novel he is certainly attributed unmanly traits such as his cowardice and his compulsive chatter.

of the Diaspora denial got, until it reached its height during the 1930s and 1940s.”⁸⁴

By holding on to his past Reuven violates one of Zionism’s central foundations of rebirth. In fact, at the beginning of the novel Reuven grapples with this negation of his roots to a point where he wonders who he is when staring at himself in the mirror: “At home they used to say ‘you look like mom’ or ‘you look like dad’, or like the uncle or grandfather. Here no one takes a close look at your face since they know only you, no mother, and no father, no one from your family....” (59). Desperate, Reuven even tries to recreate his sense of belonging through the illegal immigrants he now helps to bring to shore: “And Reuven knew that he sees and understands ‘the illegal immigrant’ called ‘ma’apil’ that he carries on his back, more than his sabra friend who stands beside him, because Reuven comes from the Diaspora and he passes this diasporic feeling that he carries from his body to the one he carries on his back” (66). Through Reuven’s character, Shriria, like Brenner and Agnon before her, explores “the myriad ways in which the intended newness of the Zionist project was continually haunted by what it sought to reject, in an extended treatment of the return of the repressed.”⁸⁵

Thus, Reuven’s refusal to erase his diasporic past illustrates one level of his subversiveness as a literary character; the second lies in the national realm which we will explore next.

⁸⁴ Almog, 128.

⁸⁵ Todd Hasak Lowy, "A Mad Dog's Attack on Secularized Hebrew: Rethinking Agnon's 'Temol shilshom'" *Prooftexts* 24, 2 (2004): 170.

PERFORMING THE SOLDIER

For the *Palmach* writers the War of Independence certainly served as “the most heightened existential experience” of their generation.⁸⁶ In later works the same writers turned to deal with “the morning after” in which the emerging post-independence society bluntly erased its former ideals and quickly adopted a corrupted bourgeois model as featured in Hendel’s *The Street of Steps*.⁸⁷ Yet, for Reuven Rimon the war serves as a different founding experience. Around him, Atara and her friends “never wondered and never asked any questions but trusted whomever that when young people are called to volunteer or are recruited they have to [do so]...and fight whoever needs to be fought” (73). At first it seems as though Reuven has finally found his destiny and the identity he so longed for in the persona of the “soldier among soldiers. No more notes and secret night shifts, but a full and proper service” (100), but soon he feels he is putting on a façade and begins questioning this role.

In “Of Mimicry and Man” Homi Bhabha examines the concept of mimicry as shaped within the Colonial discourse.⁸⁸ Whether in texts or behavior, the Colonial subject produces mimicry intended initially as an imitation of Colonial norms. Hence, the subject supposedly reproduces the Colonial origin, adopting its pattern. However,

⁸⁶ For more on the *Palmach* writers see Gertz, *Hirbet Hiz'a* and Shaked, *Hasiporet* Vol.4 182.

⁸⁷ A famous example is Aharon Megged’s *Hedva and I* which was also published in 1954 (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad) and drew a sarcastic picture of a young kibbutz member and his greedy wife who lures him to move to the big city.

⁸⁸ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York & London: Routledge, 1994) 85-93.

as Bhabha suggests, mimicry can be understood as a strategy of authority, not reproducing, but rather *contaminating* the colonial text. Bhabha then depicts mimicry as an effective yet evasive act, applied almost incidentally by the colonized. Colonial mimicry is ironic in the sense that it calls to produce an imperfect imitation of “almost the same but not quite.”⁸⁹ “Mimicry is a form of Colonial discourse... a discourse uttered between the lines and as such both against the rules and within them.”⁹⁰ For Reuven the mimicking of “brothers in arms” is never fully internalized and so his interpretation of the war and its implication begins to rupture the national ethos. Unlike Alterman’s famous poem “The Silver Platter,” where an anonymous boy and girl approach the bleeding nation to make their ultimate sacrifice, Reuven begins forming a different picture of the battlefield, a fragmented image of people and stories:

If Reuven were to be asked about specific actions or activities he would only remember where Yair was wounded, where Tedi died, when Ketiza’s lost her mind and had to be transferred the same night to the kibbutz doctor...he remembered the old woman whose son, a gifted violinist, fell on the way to Ben Shemen. She came to bring the fighters sweet tea because offering them tea was like giving it to her own son (135).

Thus, Reuven diffuses the national myths and empties them of their heroics by attaching a personal face to his war memories.

In his training camp he meets Shimon, a young boy who spent WWII as a partisan in the Polish forests. Shimon, who first turns to Reuven as his only solace, dares to bluntly phrase what Reuven only contemplates describing their fellow *sabra*

⁸⁹ Bhabha, *The Location* 85.

⁹⁰ Bhabha, *The Location* 89.

as: “A sort of anti-Semite that I wouldn’t want to meet in the battlefield. He and his likes will leave me where I am, wounded and bleeding, and will not drag me to a safe place as I am a diasporic Jew and not one of them” (120). Although he struggles with Shimon’s bitter attacks, Reuven sees himself as a natural mediator between the two identities. However, soon “Reuven discovered that Shimon prefers to listen to all this [Zionist jargon] rather than talk about his hometown and the Diaspora” (122-3). Reuven is alone again, caught in his in-between position: “Alone and lonely, between this and that Israel, caught in the middle; still young but older than them and burdened by Diaspora and Israeliness all at the same time” (123). Yet, from this inbetween position Reuven is able to both critique and resist the national narrative.

When his hometown friend dies aboard an illegal immigrant ship, Reuven wonders “What point was there to his death? Was it necessary for the establishment of the state? And did any of our enemies take his sacrifice into consideration?” (66). These questions, as well as his conversations with Shimon, challenge some of nationalism’s most prominent foundations as described by Benedict Anderson: “Finally it [the nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this *fraternity* that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as

willingly to die for such limited imaginings.”⁹¹ By contesting the assumptions laid at the core of the national project, Reuven (much like Ram) is able to step out of its boundaries. Finally, it is the war that forces Reuven to confront his national and personal doubts and allows him to make peace with his need for a connection with the past, with the Diaspora, with his Jewish roots.

Reuven’s pathetic army service ends, ironically, when he is wounded by a new recruit cleaning his rifle. Although he appears ashamed of this injury, his silence causes his acquaintances to assume he has participated in some of the more dangerous battles. Yet once again Shirra plays with her readers and hints that maybe this wasn’t entirely an accident. Suddenly, Reuven remembers “stories of people who would hurt themselves on purpose to run away from the battlefield and spend the long days of war in the custody of merciful and welcoming nurses” (137). Reuven’s injury is as an interesting take on the death of Uri, Shamir’s protagonist in *He Walked in the Fields*. Critics have already pointed to the death wish indicated in Uri’s death during a military exercise and its relations to his conflicted masculinity.⁹² Just as Uri can be seen as a young man defying his national role so does Reuven protest, through this injury, not only his national duties but also their gender derivatives. In this sense it is possible to see Reuven’s injury as a form of passive-aggressive behavior, one which

⁹¹ Anderson 7 (emphasis mine). The use of the word “fraternity” is of particular importance here—Anderson does not simply describe a familial relationship as characteristic of the national spirit, but rather a specifically male bonding experience of brotherhood.

⁹² See for example Gluzman, *Haguf hatzioni* 182-208.

allows him to resist the rigid image of the brave *sabra*. Interestingly, much like literary heroines, in both world and Hebrew literature, Reuven chooses physical ailment to protest his assigned role in society.⁹³ While Reuven is not bluntly feminized in the novel, his passive-aggressive demeanor resonates with feminine protest tactics against the ruling (patriarchal) regime.⁹⁴ As the war ends with his sudden injury, Reuven finally leaves behind the idolized figure of the *sabra*, and the national manhood it represents, and sets out on a different journey.

THE "SECOND ISRAEL"—CENTER AND PERIPHERY

Sent to a northern sanitarium to recuperate, Reuven finally meets the woman of his dreams. Regina is a Moroccan-born young woman who works at the resort as a cleaner. When Reuven first sees her he is blinded by her white skin “In the light of the morning sun the girl’s pearliness—with her arms mostly naked in a short sleeved jacket-like shirt unveiling a full figure— was like the brightness of fresh milk”(140).⁹⁵ This vision brings up familiar images from the past: “This fair skin was something Reuven used to imagine as a child, out of reach as fairies dancing at night and

⁹³ Hebrew literature found its own mistress of such poetics in Dvora Baron, who not only portrayed women with mysterious maladies in some of her stories, but apparently suffered from one herself. Baron famously locked herself in her house when she was 36 and apparently was confined to her bed for more than 30 years.

⁹⁴ For more on some of these strategies see for example Orly Lubin’s analysis of Dvora Baron’s story, “Thorne Path,” *Isha koret* 138-159.

⁹⁵ Shrira plays here with familiar stereotypes when she builds expectations for white skin as a metonymy of an Ashkenazi origin.

untouched by the sun” (140).⁹⁶ Reuven’s fantasies suggest a stereotypical portrayal of women as angels, completely detached from tangible reality, and in his case, an angel that can change the romantic disappointment he has faced so far. When he discovers who she is and where she came from, however, his vision shatters. All of a sudden, the he is torn between his attraction to Regina and the national lexicon which would categorize their bonding as abiding by the “melting pot” ideology, thus stamping his romantic interest with national justification. As before, Reuven seeks to avoid active participation “and suddenly Reuven is alarmed by his decision that this is his girl, and no other. Who and what is Reuven Rimon to aspire to conquer the obstacles of the melting pot?” (144). A newcomer who has left her family (her sister is also in Israel) Regina, like Reuven, struggles with the loss of language and culture she has left behind. Ironically, Reuven who cannot and does not wish to part with his own past, longs for a woman without one: “Like one of Botticelli's girls...who dance a spring dance by the sea and rise from giant sea-shells thrown to the beach, with no way out, without a family, a religion, a heritage” (145).⁹⁷

Why is then Regina the perfect woman for Reuven Rimon? At first it seems as though he has chosen the romantic opposite of Atara, this is a young, shy girl who

⁹⁶ There is of course much of the patriarchal classic gaze here which locates women in the "paradigmatic polarities" of angels or monsters in the words of Gilbert and Gubar 76. Yet this outlook quickly changes in the novel and therefore I will not elaborate on it here. For more see also my discussion of this topic in Chapter 2.

⁹⁷ This depiction is strikingly similar, of course, to Moshe Shamir’s depiction of Elik and reflects Reuven's initial wishes that Regina would prove devoid of history in a way he could never be.

barely speaks Hebrew, one who needs—in his mind— to be shown the ropes in the new state and absorb its (Ashkenazi) culture. Thus, Reuven, not without a hint of bigotry, imagines Regina's future education: “Reuven sees it as his duty to teach Regina so she'd know who Bialik and Tchernichovski and Ahad Haam are...He'll pass on Scholem Aleichem for the time being since she isn't ready for this taste of Jewish humor” (287). Yet as the novel progresses Shrirra, once again, pulls the rug from under her reader's expectations and Reuven finds he is the one who will need to be re-educated.

Ironically, although they seem to carry out the melting pot ideal to its fullest, it is this very national demand that prevents Reuven and Regina's union. Both are acutely aware of their differences and worry that they are breaking unwritten laws: “It angers Reuven that the second-Israel is forbidden to be in touch with the first-Israel, forbidden in conversation, in meeting and in friendship” (147).⁹⁸ When both attend a local dance at the nearby kibbutz he wonders “if it is allowed to invite a second-Israel girl to dance or not” (149) while Regina avoids him for the same reasons. Suddenly, he sees himself through her eyes, realizing she “sees ‘the first Israel’ as a hostile camp of indulgent veterans, a forbidden royalty” (172). Paradoxically, Reuven now belongs to the elite class he so longed for at the exact moment when he realizes he would

⁹⁸ The term "second Israel" refers to Sepahrdi/ Mizrahi Jews who formed the lower classes during the first thirty years of the state when the Ashkenazi elite ran most of the country's influential institutions including, of course, the government.

rather distinguish himself from it. In fact, he wishes to go back to the state where they were both “simply Jews,” an ironic wish in the newly formed state of Jews.

In 1957, when *Lovers' Bread* was published, the massive immigration of Sephardi Jews from Arab countries and North Africa had already begun to make its mark on Israeli society, especially in the social-political realm.⁹⁹ Yet Hebrew literature barely started to include Mizrahi characters in its works. Few writers like Hanoch Bartov and Yehudit Hendel strove to change this picture, but it would take ten more years for the first Mizrahi writer, Shimon Ballas, to publish his *Transit Camp* (1964) and signify the beginning of the change. Shira's choice of Regina, a young Moroccan woman, as Reuven's great love, is therefore not trivial.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, Regina is hardly formatted in the image of the Other as employed by different Israeli writers in the years to come. Like Hendel, Shira relates class and ethnic issues, thus highlighting the fact that Mizrahi Jews were underrepresented in centers of power yet overriding the Oriental/exotic factor.¹⁰¹ Within the setting of post-war Israel both Regina and Reuven, offer a cultural mixture of old and new, producing a marginal

⁹⁹ On the first political upheavals of 1959 see footnote 67.

¹⁰⁰ Interestingly in her next novel, *She'arei aza* [Gaza Gates; 1960], Shira takes a step further by positioning a Mizrahi young woman as the novel's protagonist: 20 year old Sara who immigrates to Palestine, following her husband and lacking any Zionist ambitions. Such heroines will appear later in Kahana-Carmon's "Neima Sasson"; see Kahana-Carmon, *Bikfifa aḥat*; and also in Shulamit Hareven's *Ir yamim rabim* [A City of Many Days] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1972); and *Bedidut*.

¹⁰¹ See also Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, eds. Anne McClintock, Amir Mufti and Ella Shoat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 39-66; and Batya Shimoni, *Al saf hage'ula* [On the Threshold of Redemption: The Story of the Ma'abara] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 2008).

position in a nationally-driven culture. As we will soon realize, however, it is Regina who shapes her future in the new country forcing Reuven to accept her on her own terms.

THE JOURNEY

After Reuven leaves the sanitarium he begins writing Regina short but desperate love letters where he implores her again and again to come to him. When he does not hear back from Regina he decides to take a trip across Israel and search for her. The journey Reuven sets-on makes up most of the second half of the novel. In it, Reuven joins a client of his—Haim Yahad—and together they tour the country searching for Regina. Through this excursion he faces both this new state he so longed for, and his own place within it. The journey serves as a metaphor in which “borders of identity and belonging are crossed, and the change which takes place in the traveler is also psychological.”¹⁰² Later in the novel we also follow Regina’s own quest delineating a countermove to Reuven’s thus leading to the harmonious tone of the novel’s ending.

Paradoxically, Reuven sets out to look for Regina under the false pretense of national service: “He tells his apprentice that he is going to tour the country, acting secret like his acquaintances, Atara and her friends, as though this was imposed on him from above, from the ‘high levels’ as they say...so the apprentice would think of

¹⁰² Hannah Naveh, *Nos'im venos'ot* [Men and Women Travelers: Travel Narratives in Modern Hebrew Literature] (Jerusalem: Ministry of Defense Publishing, 2002) 8.

it as a sort of reserve duty for forty days” (239). Ironically, he worries that Regina has married off quickly in order to evade her army service, her national duty, while in the first part of the novel he had practically done anything in his power to avoid the same task. However, as everywhere in this novel, Shriria suggests here two levels of criticism. On the surface it seems as though Reuven is being mocked again by the omniscient narrator, who points the correlations between what Reuven avoids and what he demands of his future bride. Yet Shriria challenges this reading by bringing Atara and Razi’s parallel story.

It turns out that during the war Atara and Razi barely see each other as pregnant Atara is left behind waiting for her husband. “When Razi became an IDF commander...he didn’t have time to deal with the little things...he was away from his home most days and only sent for Atara to join him at a party or celebration here and there” (126). One day when Atara runs down the street during an air raid “rushing to work or to the station where they made sandwiches for the men in the front” (126) she is hurt and has a miscarriage. For Atara and Razi this is a symbolic death, during symbolic times: “Both of them saw him, the unborn child, a war sacrifice, their sacrifice” (126). Through Atara’s story we learn about the hidden, personal price of the national struggle and how it is rationalized in order not to disrupt the ruling narrative of battle and victory. Atara and Razi, who make the ultimate sacrifice, in a

warped interpretation of the Jewish *Akkedah* in which Abraham is tested for his loyalty, serve as a twisted and frightening reflection of national devotion.¹⁰³

Reuven's companion in his trip is the grotesquely depicted Haim Yahad (literally in Hebrew 'living together') and one of Reuven's clients. A Polish immigrant himself, he changed his last name to follow the verse from Psalms, which became a popular Zionist folk song *Shevet Aḥim Gam Yahad* [brothers living together in unity]. When Reuven and Haim's journey continues, however, we soon discover the irony embedded in this name. Although Haim originally planned to become a farmer in Palestine he soon finds himself "in a small house at the center of a city with a garden, fruit trees and a phone..." (277). He and his wife Genya become busy party hacks who are always engaged in different official and semi-official assignments, and although Haim's name "appears in his party's list of candidates for the Knesset there are those who make sure it is at a place which will never be chosen" (277-8). But when Haim discovers who Reuven is searching for, he is taken aback by the materialization of the melting pot ideal. "What do you, a Polish born—though on the Russian border—man...have to do with a Moroccan foreign girl whose background, lifestyle, and even language are unknown to you?" (310) he demands of Reuven. Haim quickly realizes that his statements completely contradict the national ethos and that "it isn't proper for

¹⁰³ I will not go into the complex topos of the *Akkedah* here, as it is not a significant issue in the novel, but the manner in which Atara and Razi treat their loss chillingly resonates with the national interpretations of this myth. For more on this topic see Yael Feldman, *Glory and Agony: Rewriting 'Isaac' / Sacrifice in Tel Aviv* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010, forthcoming).

a man like himself, a level-headed public figure for whom the population of second Israel is almost—not-less important than the population of the first” (310). Here Shriru cruelly unveils what is hidden behind the collegial welcoming mask of the Zionist discourse. When cornered, men like Haim, who serve as the second-tier leadership of the country and are part of its new bourgeoisie elite, clearly mark the boundaries between the first and second Israel. Haim’s comments are repeated throughout the journey forcing Reuven to take a stand against those he considered his model. Thus, towards the end of their trip, the two men find themselves in a “harsh, foreign silence, not at all Israeli nor veteran-yishuv like” (338).

The search for a woman, identity, and national integration is further highlighted by the changes Reuven notices in Atara, his former idol. When Reuven stops by to visit he discovers that Atara and Razi are preparing to go abroad and work with Jewish communities there. “And Atara rushes to an esteemed tailor and fixes herself proper outfits for the wife of an attaché abroad...there she will be a representative of Israel in beauty and splendor and will wear garments with Yemenite embroidery...so they can look and realize what the national costume of an Israeli woman looks like” (223). This is of course an exaggerated version of an Oriental look which was highly popular with Israeli upper class in the 1950s. Atara is ridiculously ornamented with jewelry made by Mizrahi Jews and now presents herself “as a national model of Israel just like its national bank” (224). Stunned by what he sees, Reuven realizes that Razi and Atara have deserted their fighting days behind and are

now already ahead in the race for status and power.¹⁰⁴ Atara glowingly shares her travel fantasies with him, fantasies which are depicted as a national task since she will model the "authentic" jewelry and since "I don't want the new immigrants to work [on their crafts] without the world knowing about it" (224). Atara's ridiculed image clarifies for Reuven his future relationship with Regina as one that is freed of national symbolism. Indeed, just like Haim, Atara's generous spirit towards these exotic immigrants who weave her clothes and design the jewelry she dons, disappears once she learns about Regina: "After all you're an educated guy, a man of culture and familiar with art and public affairs," she tells Reuven, "obviously you may like the primitive and it may as they say in English, 'appeal to you'. Do you know what I'm saying? Yet this primitive is all nice and good and attractive when it's far and not necessarily when it is in your home" (400). Forgetting her former dislike of Reuven, he now becomes "one of our own" (even stronger in the Hebrew phrase *mi'anshei shlomenu*). However, after dubiously earning the title of "us" only as the negation of "them," Reuven is disillusioned and realizes that "today he and her have no mutual opinion in any matter, not even the fundamental issues. He went his way and Atara went hers" (400). Finally, as he drops the Zionist prism, the dilemma Reuven faces throughout the novel dissipates, and he now knows his path and only awaits Regina's arrival on this course.

¹⁰⁴ This scene brings to mind Aharon Megged's *Hedva and I*; see note 91.

REWRITING THE MELTING POT MYTH

In contrast to what Reuven had imagined Regina does join the army, yet not necessarily out of national commitment. She trains as a nurse so she can face Reuven as her own woman: “It is as though she does not want to come to Reuven empty-handed but with great ‘property.’ And if she has neither possessions nor assets she comes with a new, enlightened ‘profession’ that is not washing floors in the sanitarium” (385). Unlike the other women in the novel, Regina manages to determine her own fate without necessarily succumbing to the patriarchal-national model of characters like Atara and Menuha. Just like Ram and Ella in *The Street of Steps*, Reuven and Regina seem to delineate different directions in their movement in the novel, he moves away from the core of the canonized, mainstream Israeli identity while Regina draws closer and closer to it. From a simple cleaning woman she becomes a nurse, creates her own social circle and travels the country by visiting her fellow students in their home. While Reuven searched for Regina experiencing the less photogenic sides of the new state, Regina follows in his steps back to Tel Aviv and traces his journey from the opposite perspective. Her friends, a Holocaust survivor and a *sabra* who longs for a life abroad, reveal the complex mode of Israeli identity: “Thus Atzmona and Dorit remove the partitions and restrictions that keep Regina and Reuven apart, and draw them together, create their own Israel that is nothing like the first or second Israel and all the other Israel here” (430). In the end, when the young couple finally meets, this time on equal terms, Reuven realizes that his connection to

the state will occur through his immigrant beloved: “And so Regina is reborn as a new person within her military troop, an Israeli person and in the end she will return and bring into her own home this Israeliness of the landscape, of nature of language and of people” (409).

By choosing a life with Regina Reuven makes a different move than his *talush* precursors who often ended up lonely, sick or dead. Much like Hendel’s Ram he chooses a third route, neither that of the outsider nor that of the mainstream although his path leads to more hopeful resolutions. The quest for Regina is more than a search for an attractive girl; it is Reuven Rimon's search of a future in his new country. In Regina he sees an option for *tikkun*, not someone to recreate his past, nor an attempt to fit into the new Israeli mold represented by Atara. Reuven and Regina carve their path into Israeli society and ultimately redefine it by adding their own heritage and history, as well as their new love-story, to the stereotypical image of “handsome of forelock and countenance.”¹⁰⁵ Unlike Hendel, Shriria chooses here a happy Zionist ending where the power of the melting pot really does work and two former newcomers pave a new Israeli path together. Notably, the protagonists here are marginal ones, not the typical role models of the *Palmach* literature as discussed in Chapter 1. Thus, Shriria is able to both give voice to those who were often obliterated from the national narrative, and at the same time critique it from within. Much like *The Street of Steps, Lovers'*

¹⁰⁵ In Hebrew [*Yefei hablorit vehat'oar*], this is of course the famous line from Haim Guri’s “Friendship” [*Hare'ut* 1948] which became a popular commemoration song after the War of Independence.

Bread exposes the prejudice and stereotypes already embedded in the makeup of the new state and while the happy couple ends up together, their surroundings (unlike the film version of *Kazablan*, for example) continue to maintain their separate spheres and treat each other suspiciously in what would become one of Israel's most volatile socio-cultural debates.

TRANSCENDING IDENTITIES?

In "The Aesthetic of the Dismembered Body" Michael Gluzman presents a subversive reading of a canonic text—Moshe Shamir's *He walked in the Fields*—which uncovers the relations between Eros, gender and national identity. In his reading Gluzman portrays the hegemonic gaze appropriating the male protagonist—Uri— as "the public stare at his body enjoys the political anatomy performed by it."¹⁰⁶ According to Gluzman, however, Uri is unable to face this gaze and fulfill an imaginary, nationalist-masculine ideal, and thus in the end he defies it by succumbing to his suicidal urges.

Such interpretations of manhood and masculinity are usually offered as a reading of canonic texts trying to subvert the mythization of heroic characters while demonstrating their inherent ambivalence.¹⁰⁷ As we have witnessed throughout this chapter, the male anti-hero, in the novels of Yehudit Hendel and Shoshana Shrira, offers a unique angle on these questions when situated at the periphery, under the

¹⁰⁶ Gluzman, "Haguf hamerutash" 191.

¹⁰⁷ Following Homi Bhabha's discussion of Colonial ambivalence as already possessing in it the mocking of the colonized; see Bhabha *The Location* 85-92.

radar of the appropriating hegemonic gaze. Hence, these writers avoided gender and national stereotypes, allowing for a more complex depiction of their characters, by writing them from the margins. This type of writing, argues Dvora Bernstein: "Diverts the attention from the heroic story of leadership and exemplary figures. It disrupts the coherent national story constructed on an axis of growth-development-creation-fulfillment."¹⁰⁸

Hendel and Shrira do not resort to superficial inversions of gender roles nor are they simply content with writing men, but bring other issues to the front as well. By complicating their characters' construction intersecting gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and diasporic identities they broaden the sense of Israeli identity during the first decade of its formation. Significantly, the critics of their time noticed only their social agendas and ignored everything else, especially—as we have already seen with the other writers discussed here—the national aspect. The writing of a subverted manhood, however, allows the writers to explore the center from marginal male periphery (which differs from the female one).¹⁰⁹ Hendel and Shrira offer new angles, although not necessarily new themes, by engaging with male subjectivity. Both of their protagonists delineate a "third option" out of the Zionist narrative albeit on two very different levels of execution. Ram Bachar defies it by swimming against the metaphorical stream that brings Jews to their homeland. Reuven Rimon, however,

¹⁰⁸ Bernstein, *Nashim bashulaim* 12.

¹⁰⁹ As men, even marginal, they are awarded immediate participation in the public sphere, even when it is limited by other characterizations.

carves a parallel venue to the new Israeli identity post 1948, by voicing the narratives of its muted Others. While Shrira stops at suggesting a new route for her protagonist, tying this somewhat effeminate portrayal to issues of negated Jewish identity within Israeli society, Hendel goes a step further.¹¹⁰ Thus, in *The Street of Steps* she destabilizes gender and national boundaries by collapsing their inner binaries (masculine/feminine/, active/passive) moving beyond the appropriation of the male protagonist to its subversion.¹¹¹ She achieves that by exposing the "natural" links between nationalism and masculinity and the type of gender construction which represents the "appropriate" national identity. Thus, while Hendel's Ram is not feminized in *The Street of Steps*, his girlfriend is emasculated while his brother's character offers a radical feminization of another Sephardi man. Ram's complex relationship with both further highlights his displacement in the novel.

Out of all the novels read in this study, Hendel's *The Street of Steps* offers perhaps the most far-reaching reaction to Gershon Shaked's notion of the struggle with the Zionist meta-narrative. The two Bachar brothers present two radical options in the novel but both signify an act of defiance. Nissim shuns the world outside and adopts the position of the distant (feminine) spectator. Ram on the other hand, turns his back

¹¹⁰Thus both writers anticipate, and in Hendel's case even surpass, similar constructions and deconstructions of masculinity in later writings by authors such as A.B. Yehosua and Yaakov Shabtai. For more see Anne Golomb Hoffman, "Bodies and Borders: The Politics of Gender in Contemporary Israeli Fiction," *The Boom* 35-70.

¹¹¹For further distinction between the concepts see Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 121-142; Feldman, "A People that Dwells."

to the Zionist option. Thus, while the other protagonists from Yohannah, to Maya, to Eve, to Gina and finally Reuven all try to adjust or rewrite or even subvert their sexual and national identities, Ram transcends them by pulling himself out of the narrative refusing the ethos altogether—separating home from land. Notably, both Hendel and Shrira's rereading of masculinity and nation resonate in subsequent Israeli fiction which will offer a similar engagement with the obliterated diasporic identity or the resurrected Sephardi non-Zionist one.¹¹²

¹¹² Two prominent (out of many) examples are Aharon Appelfeld's novels and A.B. Yehosua's "Sephardi" works like *Molkho* and *Mr. Mani*.

CONCLUSION

"THE VOYAGE IS COMPLETED, THE WAY BEGINS"

In his only novel *Miriam* (1921), Michah Yosef Berdichevski expresses the chagrin of the [male] Hebrew reader who “has a Jewish mother [...] but lacks a Hebrew sister” that can share the joys of this new literature with him.¹ Although Berdichevski himself had devoted this novel to the story of a young woman, he probably did not anticipate the appearance of a significant and rising number of “writing sisters” in the years to come. Indeed, as we have seen throughout this work, their journey has not been an easy one.

This dissertation has offered a double view. It exposed and outlined the production of Israeli female interwar novelists whose works went largely ignored by past and contemporary scholarship, while also providing a close reading of the themes and writing styles employed by these writers. Thus, my aim here was more than to simply resurrect forgotten texts—whether canonized or not—and add them to the seemingly cohesive structure of Hebrew literature. Yet I found it necessary to do just that in order to portray a denser picture of Israeli women novelists, avoiding the notion of token writers who are “an exception to the rule,” thereby upholding this very rule, namely, the literary (male) canon. As we have seen, although some of the writers

¹ Michah Yosef Berdichevski, *Miriam: A Novel about Life in Two Townships*, trans. A.S. Super. (Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House/ The Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, 1983) 198.

achieved more critical success than others, peculiarly none of them “survived” (as noted in the different chapters) to be included in historiographies of Hebrew literature. What prompted me in this study, then, was the wish to try and fill a gap of erasure in this history, while also investigating gender and national identities as shaped by these novelists, emphasizing their importance for our reading of the story of women’s writing, both in itself and as part of Hebrew literature in general. Thus, as Susan Fraiman has put it, my readings sought “to appreciate the peculiarity and off-centeredness of even canonical female text: the marks of gender and gender resentment obscured by traditional readings and pointing in the direction of new interpretive paradigms.”²

One key factor in reading these texts, which has been raised at the beginning of the dissertation and resonated throughout the close reading of both the novels and the responses of critics, is these writers’ choice of genre. An unusual, almost improbable preference for women writers ever since the emergence of modern Hebrew literature and the belated joining of women (mostly poets) to this vibrant arena. Guided by few founding fathers, and even fewer mothers, they set out to explore the genre Lukàcs depicted as “a fluctuating yet firm balance between becoming and being...the novel, by transforming itself into a normative being of becoming, summons itself. ‘The voyage is completed, the way begins.’”³ Indeed, the genre of the novel with its unique

² Susan Fraiman, *Unbecoming Women* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1993) xxii.

³ Lukàcs 73.

breadth of narrative and the opportunity for a psychological development of the protagonists, in a way not possible in poetry, offers an adventurous voyage. The work of the interwar novelists take on every opportunity offered by the genre: from dialogism to polyphony to palimpsest writing, juxtaposing well versed canonical poetics and a defiant content that resisted the same canon. Some of their experiments even included exploring and interpreting sub-genres such as the *Bildungsroman* in Fraenkel or the diary novel in Kahana. Thus, because they had few precursors, the novelty of the genre allowed these writers a certain space and freedom, while also working against them as they defied the literary norms of their time.

By reading the different novels examined here together, a story emerges. It is the story of those relegated to the margins because they lacked the power of self-representation in face of a newly forming national identity. Yet the story told by the first Israeli women novelists is that of defiance and triumph. On the one hand, they obeyed the rules of the canon; on the other hand, they also brought into the canon what it had silenced or negated. As we have seen throughout the readings, the protagonists, female and male, are often a priori excluded from the gendered national narrative. Writing women, or marginalized men, these novelists sought out a different route, one which led them to appropriate the “father tongue” of the ruling male Symbolic Order, or in some of the cases, to subvert it from within. Thus, the marginal position of the protagonists can be seen as a source of frustration or as a possibility to tell the untold: hence Fraenkel appropriates the male *Bildungsroman* to conjure a Jewish feminine

heritage, one which summons a Sephardi past as the authentic image of Judaism, while Shriria's protagonist insists on his diasporic roots, a narrative of identity that is rejected and negated yet perseveres throughout the novel. Some of the novels we have encountered go a step further in this exploration of alternative narratives. These works succeed not only in resisting the hegemonic national narrative but in actually rewriting it. Eytan's young heroine witnesses national and patriarchal collapse and emerges from this experience as a stronger storyteller, while Hendel's former *Palmach* commander renounces the Zionist state as well as the Sepahrdi passive-aggressive stance, thereby demarcating a counter-narrative, one which will echo in future writings of Israeli literature.

By contrast, Batya Kahana critiqued the canon from its very margins, uninterrupted, thus allowing for the voice of a taboo-breaking heroine. Miriam Schwartz broke several taboos herself with an Orthodox female goddess who is first empowered by art and then chooses a death which, in defiance of patriarchy, contaminates the national land with her blood. Significantly, the female heroines in these novels seem to foreground their coming-of-age stories not only as women, defying traditional familial roles of motherhood and obedient daughters, but also as artists. The male protagonists, however, mostly undermine national manhood, resisting its demands of virility and conformity. Thus, the dissertation aimed to present new interpretations of the national narrative shaped by the point of view of alternative, stereotype-defying, protagonists. Reading these narratives together highlights

identities that were considered marginal to the center, without necessarily reiterating this center.

In the Introduction I suggested situating this dissertation between two major studies of Israeli women writers of fiction: Yaffah Berlovitz's overview of pre-state writers who fought for a national and feminine revival; and Yael Feldman's work on the 1980s foremothers, which exposed the complex treatment of feminist thinking in their work. The delineation of the interwar novelists here suggests that they both continued where Berlovitz's writers have left them, namely, with the struggle for a female poetics in the face of the hegemonic (patriarchal) literary establishment, while at the same time they also had anticipated some of the issues raised by Feldman, as they resist and subvert national-patriarchal paradigms and narratives. Surprisingly, a number of these earlier novelists succeed where some of their followers failed, namely, in managing to subvert gender and national identities.

Overall, the six novels discussed here demonstrate that women's writing has not only been prolific but also innovative and groundbreaking, as several of these novels anticipate famous moments in the history of Hebrew literature. Each of these works foreshadowed others, in either theme or content. More significantly, we have witnessed this type of foreshadowing not only within the context of women's writing or the feminine experience, but also within modern Hebrew literature at large, including its most canonic core. Thus, I suggest that by adding these texts to the canon we are now facing a slightly different, altered literary map that tells us a richer,

multilayered, and more fascinating history of the Israeli novel as part of modern Hebrew literature.

In conclusion, I hope that this study can serve as a starting point for other research projects of this period and these writers. Thus, an interesting take here could be a comparative work that would look at some of the same themes in the works of male novelists during the suggested time frame, whether they have been canonized or not. Another option that arises from the analysis offered is the further examination of literary representations in relation to gender and nation in other novels written by women during the suggested time frame, thus locating the writers discussed here in a wider referential frame, while possibly suggesting overarching themes as well as poetics.

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