

# REREADING “DECADENT” PALESTINIAN HEBREW LITERATURE: THE INTERSECTION OF ZIONISM, MASCULINITY, AND SEXUALITY IN AHARON REUVENI’S ‘AD YERUSHALAYIM Philip Hollander

**Abstract:** *This article asserts that politics motivated Aharon Reuveni to employ representations of psychic fragmentation and dysfunctional social institutions to portray Palestinian Jewish life in his novelistic trilogy ‘Ad Yerushalayim. These purportedly decadent representations helped him foreground individual and collective flaws he saw limiting the early twentieth-century Palestinian Jewish community’s development and promote norms he saw as conducive to growth. Thus, as examination of the trilogy’s central male figures demonstrates, Reuveni advances a Zionist masculinity grounded in introspectiveness and ongoing commitment to the achievement of communally shared goals. To further support this Zionist masculine form, the trilogy categorizes men who pursue homosocial ties with others who don’t maintain this masculinity as homosexuals. Thus gender and sexuality are used to coerce male readers into adopting specific behavioral norms. This attention to gender and sexuality’s role in early twentieth-century Palestinian Hebrew fiction offers a way to grasp its long-overlooked political character.*

## REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY AND ‘AD YERUSHALAYIM’S RECEPTION

In 1927, soon after the publication of his highly acclaimed expressionistic novel *Yamim ve-leilot* (Days and Nights) (1926), author Natan Bistrizky (1896–1980) spoke glowingly about Aharon Reuveni (1886–1971) and his recently completed novelistic trilogy *‘Ad Yerushalayim* (‘Til Jerusalem): “He is one of the important prose writers in Hebrew literature. He powerfully and realistically portrays Palestinian life during wartime. His novel *Shamot* (Devastation) constitutes one of Hebrew literature’s best works.”<sup>1</sup>

Labeled “a powerful new talent who promises a great deal” in 1914 by the prominent Hebrew novelist Aharon Avraham Kabak (1883–1944), Reuveni seemed to have finally met the Palestinian Hebrew literary community’s expectations and rewarded its support.<sup>2</sup> When he arrived in Palestine in 1910, after an

1. Yod Beyt [Natan Bistrizky], “Vegn der hebraisher literatur un teater in Palestine,” *Literarische Bleter*, October 11, 1929, 3, quoted in Yigal Shvarz, *Mah she-ro’im mi-kan* (Or Yehudah: Dvir, 2005), 156–157.

2. A. A. Kabak, *Masot ve-divrei bikkoret* (Jerusalem: Shalem, 1978), 228.

almost two-year journey from Siberia that took him through Manchuria, Shanghai, and Hawaii, Reuveni knew little Hebrew and had only recently begun writing prose in Yiddish, a language that he mastered during a two-year stint in the United States. Despite these barriers to his Hebrew literary development, Yosef Ḥayim Brenner (1881–1921), Palestine’s leading Hebrew literary figure, embraced him. Impressed with Reuveni’s Yiddish writing and its ability to capture Palestinian Jewish life’s essence, Brenner strove to integrate him into a protean Hebrew literary community possessing few similar talents.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Brenner translated his stories into Hebrew, published them as separate books and in journals he edited, wrote criticism promoting them, and functioned as a literary agent promoting his work with other publishers. Thus Reuveni achieved a place within the Hebrew canon even before he wrote in Hebrew.

More than eighty years after Bistrizky first proclaimed *‘Ad Yerushalayim* a masterpiece, Hebrew literary critics widely concur with his judgment. By the late 1960s the influential literary scholar Dan Miron and the seminal poet Natan Zakh were penning criticism delving into the trilogy’s merits, and Zakh boldly proclaimed that it had “no second in its panoramic character [...] in the whole of Hebrew literature.”<sup>4</sup> Yigal Shvarz’s masterful study *Lihyot kedei lihyot* (To Live to Live) (1993) further cemented Reuveni’s status.

This triumphant narrative of Reuveni’s embrace by the Hebrew literary community, however, belies a more complex reality. From the mid-twenties until the mid-fifties Hebrew readers overlooked or treated Reuveni and his work with great discomfort.<sup>5</sup> This treatment brought about a literary silence that extended, with one exception, from the early 1930s until the late 1950s. While atmospheric factors such as Reuveni’s rightward political turn, his abrasive personality, and his failure to join one of the major interwar literary camps have been used to explain his ostracism and cessation of literary activity, Shvarz argued that stylistic elements more effectively explain Reuveni’s temporary inability to connect with readers and his subsequent embrace by academic readers. He argues that contemporary readers disliked *‘Ad Yerushalayim*, because they viewed it as a distasteful roman à clef.<sup>6</sup> Not only did the aloof and distant narrative perspective inhibit readers from capturing the zeitgeist, its provocative portrayal of figures based on actual early twentieth-century Palestinian Zionist settlers proved brutal and unsympathetic. In contrast, Shvarz argues, subsequent readers, as well as contemporary diasporic readers, whose distance from the narrated events allowed them to embrace the trilogy’s dispassionate perspective, found the work a vivid historical portrayal of the Palestinian Jewish community during the First World War.

3. For a positive review of Reuveni’s work see Yosef Ḥayim Brenner, *Ktavim* 4 (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me’uḥad, 1985), 1339–1343.

4. Natan Zakh, “‘Omanut ha-roman shel A. Re’uveni,” in *Kol ma’amarei bikorret ‘al yezirato shel A. Re’uveni*, ed. Yigal Shvarz (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me’uḥad, 1992), 110; Dan Miron, *Kivun ‘orot* (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1979), 395–430.

5. On Reuveni’s work’s literary reception see Shvarz, *Mah she-ro ‘im mi-kan*, 149–200.

6. On the trilogy as a roman à clef see Yeshurun Keshet “‘Al A. Reuveni,” in *Kol ma’amarei bikorret al yezirato shel A. Reuveni*, 86–104.

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Beyond Shwarz’s observation concerning the changing response to the trilogy’s critical narratorial perspective, seemingly decadent depictions of Jewish gender and sexuality also likely contributed to its failure to achieve a significant initial readership. *Ad Yerushalayim* made Hebrew readers deeply uncomfortable owing to its employment of these depictions in portraying contemporary Palestinian Jewish life as similar to earlier Jewish life, both in Palestine and abroad, and its suggestion that psychic fragmentation and social institutions’ fragile and temporary nature proved fundamental characteristics of Jewish modernity. Nonetheless, it will be argued that neither mimetic nor aesthetic aims serve as the primary justification for the use of these representations, and that Reuveni did not incorporate them to disturb readers. Instead, he employed these depictions to promote a specific Zionist masculine form he considered best able to further a nationalist agenda, and he used the trilogy to advance an engaged style among Palestinian Hebrew writers.

### DECADENCE, EUROPEAN HEBREW LITERATURE, AND JEWISH NATIONALISM

Widespread challenges to normative behavior characterized turn-of-the-century Europe. As Elaine Showalter explains in reference to English culture, “the 1880s and 1890s [...] were decades of ‘sexual anarchy,’ when all the laws that governed sexual identity and behavior seemed to be breaking down.”<sup>7</sup> “Men became women. Women became men. Gender and country were put in doubt.”<sup>8</sup> The contemporary term most closely associated with this period of sexual anarchy was decadence. While the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as “the process of falling away or declining (from a prior state of excellence, vitality, prosperity, etc.); decay; impaired or deteriorated condition,” the scholar Charles Bernheimer, drawing on Nietzsche’s discussion of it, views it more as a constellation of different ideas and phenomena. These include decadence as something pathological that “disorganizes and fragments individuals and societies”; as a defining characteristic of modernity and the majority of mankind; as a repulsive femininity best kept at a distance; as “an aesthetics of superficiality and artifice [...] deploying] fetishistic strategies and emergent homosexual tropes.”<sup>9</sup>

In an atmosphere of “changing historical and cultural paradigms,” where innovative aesthetic and literary trends were spreading, European Hebrew writers engaged with decadence in its various permutations; as Shachar Pinsker has convincingly argued, this engagement drew them to decadent writers like Oscar Wilde, whose aesthetic approach to the representation of gender and sexuality contributed to Hebrew modernism’s emergence.<sup>10</sup> Thus the appearance of the “effeminate ‘dandy’ male, the homosexual, the androgyne, the femme fatale and

7. Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture in the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990), 3.

8. Karl Miller, *Doubles: Studies in Literary History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1985), 209.

9. Charles Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 26–27.

10. Shachar Pinsker, *Literary Passports: The Making of Modernist Hebrew Fiction in Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 159, 147–164.

the masculinized women” in Hebrew literature owes a debt to Wilde and Russian Silver Age authors like Fyodor Sologub (1863–1927) and Mikhail Kuzmin (1872–1936).<sup>11</sup>

Despite Pinsker’s important insights into literary decadence’s contribution to the emergence of Hebrew modernism in Europe, his approach doesn’t fully engage with all facets of decadence. Decadent thought forecast the fragmentation and dissolution of Jewish society and the pathological men who belonged to it. This acceptance of individuals’ and nations’ inevitable decline made early twentieth-century Hebrew writers deeply uncomfortable, and, as a result, they distanced themselves from decadent thought even as they drew upon elements of literary decadence.<sup>12</sup> It is, therefore, predictable, in seeming rebuttal to Pinsker’s privileging of the European literary context and his downplaying of early twentieth-century Hebrew literature’s Zionist character, that literary historian Dan Miron has argued concerning the style of Brenner, widely considered early twentieth-century Hebrew fiction’s prime mover, that “[Brenner’s] keen interest in European ‘decadence’ and current ‘Silver Age’ Russian symbolist writing notwithstanding, he believed in ‘realist symbolism’ [...] and in the need of literature to directly involve itself in the existential issues the writer and his readers were facing.”<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Pinsker’s claim that almost every notable Hebrew modernist writer lacked Zionist commitment and made no effort to advance “a masculine ideal for the emerging Jewish (or ‘Hebrew’) national identity” capable of countering the “imbrication of Jewishness, effeminacy, and sexual decadence” requires further substantiation.<sup>14</sup>

#### DECADENCE, ZIONISM, AND THE PALESTINIAN CONTEXT

The issues and phenomena of decadence stimulate efforts to attain “a position outside of decadence that would enable one to judge it as such” with “some mode of knowledge, some standard of ethics, [or] some conception of health” necessary for its attainment, and many Zionists, like contemporary European nationalists, pointed to national affiliation as a gateway to such knowledge, ethics, and health.<sup>15</sup> It is, therefore, unsurprising that Zionist pioneers employed the 1920 battle of Tel Hai to mark a new beginning indicative of a transition from an exilic period of abjection to a period of national revival. As part of this ongoing effort, they advanced the idealized figure of the native-born Palestinian Jewish male, or sabra, with his attractive appearance, his physical rootedness in the land, and his moral character as an exemplar of the emerging Palestinian

11. Shachar Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 163.

12. Hamutal Bar-Yosef, *Maga ‘im shel dekadens: Bialik, Berdichevski, Brenner* (Be’er Sheva: Hoza’at Ha-sfarim shel Universitat Ben-Gurion Ba-Negev, 1997), 13–41. On contemporary Jewish anxieties about individual and collective Jewish demise see Arieh Bruce Saposnik, “Exorcising the ‘Angel of National Death’—Nation and Individual Death (and Rebirth) in Zionist Palestine,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 3 (2005): 557–578.

13. Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity: Towards a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 117.

14. Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 158, 168, 162.

15. Bernheimer, *Decadent Subjects*, 26–27.

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Zionist community. Significant efforts were made to distinguish this figure by distancing it from its purportedly outmoded diasporic predecessors.<sup>16</sup>

Despite efforts to promote the figure of the sabra and Palestinian Zionism’s ability to supply the Jewish people and its individual proponents with an antidote to decadence, one is hard pressed to find strong-bodied, healthy, and vigorous masculine figures capable of serving as emulative models in early twentieth-century Palestinian Hebrew literature.<sup>17</sup> Instead, numerous Palestinian Hebrew works published after 1920, including works like *‘Ad Yerushalayim*, featured representations of Jewish gender and sexuality similar to those found in European fin de siècle works of literary decadence.<sup>18</sup>

In inferring contemporary Palestinian Jewish life’s similarity to earlier Jewish life, both in Palestine and abroad, and viewing psychic fragmentation and social institutions’ fragile and temporary nature as insurmountable aspects of Jewish modernity, Palestinian Hebrew works that include decadent representations of Jewish gender and sexuality disturbed contemporary Palestinian Hebrew readers. Thus, Palestinian Hebrew literature written by important early twentieth-century writers like Reuveni, Levi Aryeh Arieli (1886–1943), Dov Kimḥi (1889–1961), and Natan Bistrizky (1896–1980), embraced by literary critics in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, achieved limited scholarly attention and were largely unappreciated by Hebrew readers in the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. This marginalization can be seen as part of what scholar Nitsa Ben-Ari has referred to as “sabra puritanism.”<sup>19</sup>

Hebrew critics’ discomfort with the presence of decadent motifs in Palestinian Hebrew literature is already visible in the late Ottoman period, with prominent critic Ya’akov Rabinowitz (1875–1948) chastising Arieli for using these themes in his story “Ha-na’ar Bunyah” (The Youth Bunyah) (1912).<sup>20</sup> Yet discomfort with

16. Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 33–34; Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

17. For mention of some prominent exceptions see Gluzman, *Ha-guf ha-ziyoni: le’umiyut, migdar ve-miniyut ba-sifrut ha-ivrit ha-ḥadashah* (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me’uḥad, 2007), 26, 149, 185; For lengthier discussion of these works and their authors see Yaron Peleg, “Heroic Conduct: Homoeroticism and the Creation of Modern, Jewish Masculinities,” *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 13, no. 1 (Fall 2006), 38–40; Gershon Shaked, *Ha-sipporet ha-ivrit 1880–1980*, vol. 2 (Tel Aviv: Ha-kibbutz Ha-me’uḥad, 1978), 44–55, 59–61.

18. For a contextual discussion of the presence of literary decadence in Palestinian Hebrew literature see David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1997), 176–203. Reuveni composed *‘Ad Yerushalayim* between 1917 and 1920, but its publication extended well into the twenties. The first novel was published in serial form, while the two subsequent novels were published as independent books: Aḥaron Reuveni, “Be-raishit ha-mevukhah,” *Ha-‘adamah* 1 (1919–20), 11–30; 141–159; 338–343; 392–415; 501–523; Aḥaron Reuveni, *Ha-‘oniyot ha-‘ahronot* (Warsaw: Shtibel, 1923); Aḥaron Reuveni, *Shamot* (Warsaw: Shtibel, 1925).

19. Nitsa Ben-Ari, *Suppression of the Erotic: Censorship and Self-Censorship in Hebrew Literature 1930–1980* (Ottawa: Ottawa University Press, 2006), 74–109.

20. Ya’akov Rabinowitz, “Bentayim,” *Ha-po’el ha-za’ir*; November 29, 1912.

decadent motifs and imagery increased during the interwar period, as can be seen in critic Sh. Levitan's early review of Reuveni's trilogy. Levitan saw the need for the trilogy's principal characters to voice "the spirit of their generation"; he took Reuveni to task for his decadent representations of sexuality and gender.<sup>21</sup> Reuveni overpopulated his trilogy with prostitutes, and defamed the Old Yishuv's women when he portrayed one of them engaging in premarital sex.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Levitan disapproved of Reuveni's representation of "unnatural" heterosexual relations, Turkish officers' homosexual proclivities, and rape of Jewish soldiers in the Ottoman military—things that "make a bad impression."<sup>23</sup>

Even after sabra puritanism faded and works by Reuveni, Arieli, Kimḥi, and Bistrizky found receptive critics, these writers retained a decadent label. Thus, when Nili Sadan analyzed Reuveni, Kimḥi, and Bistrizky's literary work published during the 1920s, she pointed to an underlying shared belief in the Zionist revolution's inevitable failure.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, Adi Zemaḥ praised Arieli's novella *Yeshimon* (Wasteland) (1920–22) despite his categorization of its author as a Hebrew Otto Weininger.<sup>25</sup>

While Reuveni indeed viewed Jewish modernity as characterized by psychic dissolution and social institutions' impermanence, in accordance with ideas that Bernheimer links to decadence, it is distortive to affix the decadent label to him and many other Hebrew writers who immigrated to Palestine and employed decadent representations of gender and sexuality. It severs them from their immediate cultural context and the Palestinian Zionist project to which they dedicated much of their lives. Many of them turned to fiction for the express purpose of offering a more sophisticated justification for Zionist action, which did not require pinning one's hopes on the emergence of a masculine ideal type wholly divorced from decadence. "While early Zionist writers were committed to expressing individuality, they simultaneously curbed its excesses by depicting its dangers and failures and implying that it be channeled to collectivist aims."<sup>26</sup>

21. Sh. Levitan, "Shamot," *Do'ar ha-yom*, May 15, 1925.

22. "Old Yishuv" refers to prestate Palestine's non-Zionist Jewish religious community and "New Yishuv" refers to its Zionist community. For a broader discussion of these terms and their historicity see Yisra'el Bartal, "'Yishuv hadash' ve-'yishuv yashan"—ha-dimui ve-ha-mezi'ut," in *Galut ba-'arez: yishuv 'erez -yisra'el be-terem ziyonut* (Jerusalem: Ha-sifriyah Ha-ziyonit, 1995), 74–90.

23. Levitan, "Shamot."

24. Nili Sadan-Lubenstein, "Magemot dekadentiot be-sifrut ha-mehagrim bi-shnot ha-'esrim be-'erez-yisra'el" (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, 1976); for more on Sadan's dissertation see Avidov Lipsker, introduction to *Aḥaron Reuveni: Monografiyah*, by Nili Sadan (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Po'alim, 1994), 7–10.

25. Adi Zemaḥ, "Min ve-'ofi le'umi: zemed nosi'im be-'yeshimon' shel L. A. Arieli," *Moz-nayim* 53, nos. 5–6 (1982): 371–383; for a similar argument see Gershon Shaked, "Ha-te'om she-yarad—'al yezirato shel L. A. Arieli-Orlof," *Siman kri'ah* 5 (February 1976), 481–491.

26. Mikhal Dekel, *The Universal Jew: Masculinity, Modernity, and the Zionist Movement* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2011), 195–196.

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### JEWISH MASCULINITY AND DECADENT HEBREW REPRESENTATION

Awareness of Hebrew literature’s participation in broader efforts to create a new Jewish society proves useful for understanding purportedly decadent Hebrew literary representations of gender and sexuality created in prestate Palestine. Like all incipient societies, the New Yishuv struggled with what anthropologist David Gilmore refers to as “the existential ‘problem of order.’”<sup>27</sup> Solving this problem required that it “encourag[e] people to act in certain ways, ways that facilitate[d] both individual development and group adaptation”; the advancement of masculine norms, Gilmore argues, constitutes one of the best ways to do this.<sup>28</sup> Since the Palestinian Hebrew reading public, like its east European counterpart, “looked up to literature (including fiction and poetry), expecting it to tell it what to do,” Palestinian Hebrew literature proved a valuable vehicle for the promotion of masculine norms, which became one of Palestinian Hebrew literature’s central features.<sup>29</sup>

The field of masculinity studies developed out of feminist studies with the express intent of exploring masculinity’s variegated historical constructions. Over the last twenty-five years, scholars have pushed beyond Jewish masculinity’s reification to investigate the continuities linking and the ruptures separating modern forms of Jewish masculinity one from another and from their premodern antecedents. George Mosse’s observation, that the Jewish male’s outsider status in the European modernization process led to his portrayal as a gentle and weak countertype associated with femininity and homosexuality, proved an important first step in the field’s development. It helped subsequent scholars recognize that such characterization and its relationship to the difficult social, political, and economic conditions facing fin de siècle European Jewry seriously impacted Jewish men, many of whom, at least in their fantasy lives, looked to assume a more heroic male image to aid in individual and/or Jewish collective betterment. Rather than belittling the importance of Jewish male fantasies, literary critic Mikhal Dekel recently pointed to their centrality in the fin de siècle creation of a Jewish national or Zionist imaginary, which brought Jewish men together to transform the Jewish people from a European minority into a sovereign Palestinian majority.<sup>30</sup>

While scholars of Jewish masculinity agree about the important role played by efforts to transform masculinity in the State of Israel’s ultimate creation, sharp disagreements exist concerning the essence of the Zionist masculinity that took hold in Palestine. Scholars have overwhelmingly concurred with Harry Brod’s conclusion that, “to create a heroic Jewish male image one must abandon the Jewish component and rely on the dominant culture’s version of the heroic

27. David Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 3.

28. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, 3. Similarly, George Mosse points to the centrality of manhood ideals to the European nation-state’s development. See George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 77.

29. Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity*, 52. Michael Gluzman noted this centrality early on. See Gluzman, *Ha-guf ha-zivoni*, 11.

30. Dekel, *Universal Jew*, 5–6.



male. Jewish male heroes must be non-Jewish Jews.”<sup>31</sup> For example, cultural critics Michael Gluzman and Todd Presner, influenced by Michel Foucault’s work, posit that Zionist masculinity centered on the Jewish male body’s transformation to accord with European physical ideals.<sup>32</sup> Also influenced by Foucault’s work, cultural critic Daniel Boyarin argues for a Zionist masculinity grounded in mimicry of a “vengeful, violent ... ideal Aryan male.”<sup>33</sup> More recently, Yael Feldman and Mikhal Dekel follow influential scholars of nationalism Benedict Anderson and George Mosse to argue for a Zionist masculinity based on an ideal male willing to sacrifice his life for the nation.<sup>34</sup>

In analyzing the masculine representations of *‘Ad Yerushalayim*, one must see that it does not necessarily support the centrality or “hegemony” of one of these imitative masculine models in prestate Palestine; rather its analysis requires a more complex understanding of Zionist masculinity that moves beyond a binary understanding of masculinity (Jewish vs. non-Jewish) and clarifies the role played by decadent representation in early twentieth-century Palestinian Hebrew literature.<sup>35</sup> Despite efforts by Zionist pioneers to restart Jewish history, many Palestinian Jewish men viewed the type of total masculine transformation implied by the aforementioned Zionist masculine models as unrealizable. Therefore they proposed alternatives and participated in ongoing struggles amongst Palestinian Zionists over Zionist masculinity’s proper form and its relationship to the Jewish nation’s future character.

Reuveni, like other leading Hebrew writers, opposed the radically transformative masculine ideals advanced by Palestinian Zionists, because he believed they had limited social utility. While ideals grounded in bodily development, aggressive behavior, or readiness for self-sacrifice might boost individual self-confidence, they don’t necessarily support societies’ mobilization to realize their procreative, provisioning, and protective goals through the imposition of masculine norms. Therefore, when Hebrew writers opposing these ideals turned to literature, they asserted alternative Zionist masculine forms that they saw as more realizable and better suited to group aims.

Reuveni advanced such an alternative Zionist masculinity in *‘Ad Yerushalayim*. Homosociality, introspection, and ongoing commitment to the achievement of communally shared goals constituted key aspects of a Zionist masculinity that didn’t require diasporic Jewish men to negate their earlier lives. Rather it required

31. Harry Brod, “Of Mice and Supermen,” in *Gender and Judaism*, ed. Tamar M. Rudavsky (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 283.

32. Gluzman, *Ha-guf ha-ziyoni*; Todd Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

33. Dekel, *Universal Jew*, 108. For a fuller discussion of Boyarin’s position see Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct: The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Modern Jewish Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 271–312.

34. Dekel, *Universal Jew*, 34; Yael Feldman, *Glory and Agony: Isaac’s Sacrifice and National Narrative* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

35. Leading masculinity scholars have suggested such an analytical shift. See R. W. Connell and James Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005): 829–859.



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that Zionist-affiliated Palestinian Jewish men confront their sense of psychic fragmentation and their polymorphously perverse sexuality, recognize the need to work together to accomplish their goals, create or commit themselves to a viable plan of action, and embrace the pleasure inherent in working alongside Jewish men making similar efforts.<sup>36</sup> Such masculinity required that Jewish men take responsibility for their actions, cease blaming others for their problems, and work to avoid antisocial behavior, but nothing about it necessitated they change their character. Indeed, through its collective embrace, Jewishness could be transformed rather than denied.

### ‘AD YERUSHALAYIM—PLOT SUMMARY AND STRUCTURE

*Be-raishit ha-mevukhah* (When Confusion Began), *Ha-’oniyot ha-’ahronot* (The Last Ships), and *Shamot* (Devastation), the three novels comprising ‘*Ad Yerushalayim*, employ different novelistic forms, proceed at divergent paces, and focus on different protagonists, but through a complex portrayal of Jewish life in Palestine during the First World War they collectively produce an important statement about Palestinian Jewish society.<sup>37</sup>

*Be-raishit ha-mevukhah* focuses on the accountant Aharon Zifroviz and portrays the collapse of his life in Palestine. Just prior to the war’s outbreak Zifroviz prepares to marry his fiancée Manyah Appelbaum and firmly root himself in the Jerusalem landscape, but inability to cope with wartime feelings of insecurity lead him to leave Ottoman Palestine at the novel’s end. Despite its focus on Zifroviz, the novel revolves around the Jerusalem political journal *Ha-derekh* (The Way), whose contributing writers and staff, including Zifroviz, constitute the novel’s primary characters. Like the fictional newspaper *Ha-mahreishah* (The Plow), featured in Brenner’s novel *Mi-kan u-mi-kan* (From Here and from Here) (1911), which is loosely based on the important labor newspaper *Ha-po’el Ha-za’ir* (The Young Worker), *The Way* resembles *Ha-’ahdut* (The Unity), the newspaper of ‘*Ahdut Ha-’avodah* (The Labor Unity) party. Therefore one can view the paper and characters Hayim Ram, Givoni, and Ben-Mattiyahu, who prove similar to Yizhak Ben-Zvi (1884–1963), the State of Israel’s second president, David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973), Israel’s first prime minister, and Labor Zionist leader Ya’akov Zerubavel (Vitkin) (1886–1967), as part of a veiled portrayal of actual events. But it proves more fruitful to view the paper and its staff as fictional elements employed by Reuveni to indirectly comment on the New Yishuv’s social organization.

36. Polymorphously perverse sexuality refers here to openness to the pursuit of sexual gratification wherever it might be found. For more on this idea see Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 57, 97–109.

37. For recent scholarly discussions of ‘*Ad Yerushalayim* see Glenda Abramson, *Hebrew Writing of the First World War* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2008), 261–297; Andrea Siegel, “Rape and the ‘Arab Question’ in L. A. Arieli’s *Allah Karim!* and Aharon Reuveni’s *Devastation*,” *Nashim* 23, no. 1 (2012): 110–128. For earlier readings see Shvarz, *Lihyot kedei lihyot: ‘Aḥaron Re’uveni—monographiyah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1993), 155–255; Sadan-Lubenstein, ‘*Aḥaron Re’uveni*, 143–243; Shaked, *Ha-sipporet ha-’ivrit*, 2:143–150; Shvarz, ed., *Kol ma’amarei bikkoret*.

In *Ha-'oniyot ha-'ahronot*, which opens following Zifroviz's departure from Palestine, the trilogy shifts its focus to Gedalyah Brenchuk, a staff writer at *The Way*. A misanthrope, he welcomes the Ottoman Empire's declaration of war and Jewish flight en masse from Jerusalem, because it provides him with an opportunity to write unencumbered by social relations. Yet writer's block plagues him, and he only overcomes it following participation in large-scale efforts to stem massive locust swarms that plagued Palestine in March 1915 and threatened the food supply. With his novel completed, Brenchuk travels to Jaffa to leave Palestine on the last westbound ship. The Ottoman authorities, however, foil his escape from Palestine and the harsh existential conditions it represents. After being beaten for draft dodging together with other escapist Jewish men, Brenchuk is released and flees inland. The novel concludes with Brenchuk's reacquisition of his lost manuscript.

Brenchuk appears in *Shamot*, the trilogy's concluding novel, but Me'ir Funk, a young worker who fought the locust swarms with him, assumes center stage. Opening with a detailed description of Jerusalem's Naḥalat Ya'akov neighborhood and Doberman House, where Funk resides, the novel pits him against his non-Zionist Jewish surroundings. Employing members of the Doberman House-based Wetstein family to offer a broad portrait of these environs, the novel addresses the possibility of Jewish social transformation. *Shamot* begins optimistically, but Funk's surroundings slowly engulf him and inhibit his meeting Palestinian Jews' needs. Funk marries Esther Wetstein and fathers a child. Yet a sequence of events that begins with his unexpected arrest by Ottoman authorities slowly undermines his self-confidence. Disregarding the opportunity to avoid military service, Funk mobilizes and soon commits suicide.

While the trilogy's three novels might seem like three loosely linked but independent works, they share more than an atmospheric connection.<sup>38</sup> Dan Miron has convincingly demonstrated that associative links connect them.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, identification of the trilogy's preferred form of masculinity requires analysis of the novels' interrelationship. One can view the trilogy as a "thicket composed of the characters' psychology and the randomness of the circumstances that bring these characters to action," but comparison of the seemingly separate plot lines taking place against a shared societal background offers a path through this thicket.<sup>40</sup>

The following comparative analysis focuses on four portrayed men—Funk, Zifroviz, Brenchuk, and Leyzer Wetstein—to demonstrate how Reuveni employs their failures to elucidate how Palestinian Jewish men could best meet their developing society's needs. First, through Me'ir Funk's story, Reuveni rejects Zionist efforts to base their settlement project on a yet-to-emerge masculine ideal, parallel to the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, untroubled by psychic fragmentation. Next,

38. Others disagree with my position; cf. Shaked, *Ha-sipporet ha-'ivrit*, 2:144; Abramson, *Hebrew Writing*, 276–295.

39. For further discussion of this issue, see Miron, *Kivun 'orot*, 419; Shvarz, *Lihyot kedei lihyot*, 164–166.

40. Gershon Shaked, *'Omanut ha-sippur shel 'Agnon* (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Ha-po'alim, 1976), 47.

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through the portrayal of Zifroviz, Reuveni voices the sense of psychic fragmentation and accompanying weakness that consciously trouble Jewish male immigrants to Palestine. While other immigrant men marginalize Zifroviz in order to distance themselves from similar feelings, Reuveni emphasizes the need for communal leaders, including writers, to address these feelings and develop strategies for working through them so that Jewish men can better achieve their collective aims. Leyzer Wetstein’s narrative clarifies that not all Palestinian Jewish men find feelings of psychic dissolution troubling enough that they will adhere to collective-oriented strategies for overcoming them. Consequently, men unwilling to participate in such efforts need to be marked as possessing non-normative gender and sexuality and placed outside communal boundaries. Finally, through Brenchuk’s narrative, Reuveni shows how Palestinian Hebrew writers can become leaders. They can perform a critical social function and give meaning to their writing and their lives, by using literature to voice feelings of psychic disintegration and powerlessness revealed through introspection and to demonstrate how Palestinian Jewish men can advance their personal and collective agendas by working to overcome them together with other Jewish men.

### MASCULINITY IS ONLY SKIN DEEP

With Hebrew readers awaiting the appearance of an idealized Palestinian Jewish male, whose attractive appearance, physical rootedness in the land, and moral character would herald Zionism’s successful distancing of the Jewish people from Diaspora decline, Me’ir Funk most likely captured their imagination.<sup>41</sup> He most closely embodies the body-centered Jewish masculine ideal type.<sup>42</sup> Long muscular arms, broad shoulders, and a calm, strong facial expression communicate his potential energy. His carpentry, “productive labor” distancing him from “parasitic” Jews critiqued in anti-Semitic discourse, similarly communicates his potential.<sup>43</sup> His physique and productivity attract men and women. Both his future wife Esther, who sleeps with him out of wedlock, and Zipporah Blumenthal, with whom he commits adultery, can’t resist his charm. When he avenges a vulnerable Jewish girl who was raped and murdered, his masculine power finds voice. Finally, when called to military service, Funk unhesitatingly enlists.

Despite Funk’s seeming exemplarity, Reuveni challenges those who would elevate him above other Jewish men and use him to illustrate the emergence of a Jewish superman on Palestinian soil. Lacking self-control, Funk commits suicide and bequeaths state-building efforts to other Jewish men. Indeed, rather than standing apart, his psychology unites him with other Palestinian Jewish men.<sup>44</sup>

41. Almog, *Sabra*, 73–137; Avner Holtzman, *Ahavot Ziyon*, (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2006), 320.

42. For further discussion see Miron, *Kivun ’orot*, 414–417; Shvarz, *Lihyot kedei lihyot*, 185–190. For more on the turn-of-the-century assertion of a new body-centered Jewish masculine form see Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct*; Gluzman, *Ha-guf ha-ziyoni*; Pressner, *Muscular Judaism*.

43. For further discussion of productivization and modern Jewish history see Derek Penslar, *Shylock’s Children: Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Jewish Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 107–123; 205–216.

44. Alexander Karmon, “‘Shamot’ le-’A. Re’uveni,” *Do’ar ha-yom*, July 26, 1925.

Exploration of this shared psychology elucidates the contours of what Reuveni sees as a key impediment to the New Yishuv's development.

The aforementioned description of the Naḥalat Ya'akov neighborhood and Doberman House, which opens *Shamot*, places Funk within a setting that symbolically communicates the struggle against anarchic psychological elements, which is central to the trilogy. In contrast with the recently created city of Tel Aviv and other Jerusalem neighborhoods where members of the Hebrew literary and Zionist political circles reside, Naḥalat Ya'akov represents the Old Yishuv. As in Brenner's contemporaneous novel *Shkhol ve-kishalon* (Breakdown and Bereavement) (1920) and Agnon's subsequent novel *Tmol shilshom* (Only Yesterday) (1945), it stands in for diasporic Jewish existence.

Description of the stench of urine and feces enveloping Doberman House's courtyard communicates Reuveni's belief in the perceivably flawed nature of diasporic Jewish existence. Consequently, when Funk rents a room in Doberman House, rather than settling in Tel Aviv or on a new agricultural settlement, Reuveni symbolically asserts that Palestinian Jewish immigrants can't transcend their Diaspora past. Immigrants like Funk maintain an insuperable psychic connection and even an attraction to it, including its decadent elements, and confrontation with it, rather than its repression, constitutes the best way of moving beyond its deleterious manifestations.

Funk wants to move beyond his diasporic past's negative elements, but, by acting in isolation, he fails. His physique and physical strength prove less significant than his social views. Inspired by the Russian Narodniks, whose late nineteenth-century commitment to the Russian peasantry he idealizes, Funk strives to cultivate the Jewish folk's pure spirit for social betterment.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, he assumes responsibility for the Wetstein family's development after renting a room in their home. He never considers the appropriateness of his approach. The sacrifices prove tremendous, he finds little satisfaction, and his dedication doesn't change the Wetsteins. Rather, his fiancée and her mother attempt to mold him to meet traditional Jewish masculine standards. They push him to assume a religious lifestyle and study sacred texts. Aware that his social reform plan has failed, Funk doesn't know how to change course.<sup>46</sup>

With his social transformation efforts stymied, Funk's temporary imprisonment for suspected draft dodging further challenges his sense of self-worth and causes harmful psychic forces to reemerge. Identifying with Jewish men who hid in cellars and under beds during Russian pogroms, he views himself as "an object denied individual will, given into the hands of the willful to do with as they please."<sup>47</sup> His state-building efforts and his ongoing struggle against objectification seem quixotic. While an early fantasy of death by hanging highlights his

45. For earlier discussion of this connection see Miron, *Kivun 'orot*, 407.

46. For a fuller description of Funk's mental limitations see Reuveni, *Shamot*, 22.

47. Reuveni, *Shamot*, 98.

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fear of death and objectification, subsequent fantasies of being whipped, shot, and stabbed voice a masochistic desire for humiliation, suffering, and death.<sup>48</sup>

Rather than addressing his masochism’s inhibiting effect, he marries Esther and perseveres in what he perceives as an increasingly restrictive communal life. Esther doesn’t erotically attract him. Instead he feels obligated to her. As he admits, “her adherence to him was somewhat like a burden.”<sup>49</sup> He proposes marriage as a quid pro quo. As he exclaims after Esther finances a temporary military deferment, “you liberated me from army service—I’ll serve you from today! ... I’ll be your soldier! ... Forever.”<sup>50</sup> Even premarital sex doesn’t cement their relationship. As he tersely concludes, “the awakening of the flesh and the flood of new life did not envelop him to the degree that it enveloped her.”<sup>51</sup>

Despite his relationship’s deadening nature, Funk possesses tremendous vitality harnessable for the realization of collective goals. Adulterous sex reveals it:

His ego, the everyday one, that thinks and thinks, the one that maintains permissive and prohibitive standards—suddenly was cast down from the heights of its throne, it was cancelled and it was as if it never was, and its place was taken by a savage force, that burst forth from the unknown depths, and this force was also him, Me’ir Funk, yet it was a completely different him.<sup>52</sup>

The shattering of an ego grounded in outdated social values reveals a potentially new identity capable of making Me’ir feel alive. While his adultery arouses guilt and shame that make Funk uncomfortable, a vital new identity grounded in transvalued Jewish values could counterbalance his passive masochistic tendencies and his feared repetition of past Diaspora events, thus dispelling those very feelings of guilt and shame. Yet arrival at new normative masculine standards proves unattainable outside a social framework capable of reassuring Funk of the propriety of his emergent identity.

Funk’s confrontation with the Arab watchman Hadj Youssef reveals both his ability to embrace a new transvalued Jewish identity and the psychological issues preventing its ultimate adoption. Youssef’s broad muscular body, dark skin, “primitive” Arab identity and emergent vitality mark him as a potential model of emulation for Funk.<sup>53</sup> Like Funk, his obedience to external authority leaves him feeling impotent and dissatisfied. He views the world as a desert whose rewards are denied him, but he throws off his perception of himself as a harem eunuch,

48. See Reuveni, *Shamot*, 27–8, 108, and 113–4, for prominent examples of these fantasies.

49. Reuveni, *Shamot*, 105.

50. Reuveni, *Shamot*, 128.

51. Reuveni, *Shamot*, 136.

52. Reuveni, *Shamot*, 205.

53. For more on Youssef’s role in this scene, see Siegel, “Rape and ‘The Arab Question,’” 120–124; On the idealization of Arabs in contemporary Hebrew fiction and their role in Jewish identity’s reimagination see Yaron Peleg, *Orientalism and the Hebrew Imagination* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

and resolves to possess the naked Jewish female bodies he secretly observes.<sup>54</sup> Embracing, without hesitation, his submerged sense of masculine vitality, Youssef rapes and murders a Jewish girl, and he proves ready to repeat his actions. Elevated above the herd by his disregard for external authority, Youssef presents Funk, who is aware of his crime, with a manifestation of the vital superman that he yearns to become. Consequently, through confrontation with this consummate Arab Other, Funk achieves greater clarity about his character.<sup>55</sup>

Funk tries to avoid confrontation with Youssef, but he can't excuse his amoral behavior. The vitalistic Nietzschean model Youssef personifies disgusts him. Thus, when a suspicious Youssef attacks and beats him, Funk fights back and emerges victorious. In doing so Funk embraces a new transvalued Jewish identity that combines a vitality previously engaged for perceivably unconscionable acts with the assertion of basic moral standards.

Unable to comprehend the significance of his momentary integration of vital experience into a new moral framework, an isolated Funk steps back from the establishment of new Jewish standards. Employing existent Jewish moral principles, he judges himself a murderer and disengages his vital core as punishment. As a result, his dissatisfaction with his banal existence festers and even military mobilization doesn't liberate him from it. Fearful that he will prostitute himself to Ottoman officers, like other young Jewish men, Me'ir soon commits suicide. Rather than bettering the Wetsteins' lives and constructing a new Zionist society, Funk's failure to address his sadomasochism leads him to abandon his wife and newborn child, whose ability to fend for themselves proves doubtful. Rather than representing an elevated model of Jewish masculinity, justifying critical disregard of the trilogy's other male characters, Funk betrays a troubled Jewish masculinity. Accomplishment of Zionist aims requires a more complex response than bodybuilding and professional modification.

#### BLAMING THE VICTIM: AHARON ZIFROVIZ AND THE STILLBORN ZIONIST COMMUNITY

Besides unduly elevating Funk, literary critics have unnecessarily denigrated Aharon Zifroviz.<sup>56</sup> By concentrating on these characters' differences and overlooking their fundamental similarity, critics have come to view Zifroviz as a degenerate figure incapable of effective Zionist involvement, and missed how Reuveni employs Zifroviz to critique Zionist leaders for their failure to develop a national consciousness capable of bringing together diverse elements for the pursuit of shared aims.

While Zionists had little tangible political power in late Ottoman Palestine, the persuasive power wielded by Palestinian Hebrew literature and journalism

54. Reuveni, *Shamot*, 186.

55. Reuveni and his contemporaries parodied Hebrew literature's idealized Arab and worked to construct an Israeli identity in stark contrast to Arab primitivism. See Yoḥai Oppenheimer, *Me-'ever la-gader: yizug ha-'aravim ba-sipporet ha-'ivrit ve-ha-yisra'elit (1906-1922)* (Tel Aviv: 'Am 'Oved, 2008), 52-81.

56. For this view's most sophisticated statement see Shvarz, *Lihyot kedei lihyot*, 185-190.

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endowed these institutions with the ability to shape an effective response to the crises the New Yishuv faced following the outbreak of the First World War. Yet the trilogy’s allusion to a female Jerusalem’s rape by a male Ottoman Empire points to their failure to do so and assigns blame to the political leadership embodied by those united around the Jerusalem political journal *Ha-derekh* (The Way).

As the New Yishuv coalesced in the interstices between European and Ottoman power, its self-appointed leaders, blind to potential dangers and extant possibilities, failed to elaborate and effectively promote viable norms for a unifying national consciousness.<sup>57</sup> As Zifroviz notes, *The Way*’s leading figures “did everything like they did it in Vilna or Kiev ten years earlier. Nothing in them changed, except that their skin got thicker.”<sup>58</sup> Palestinian conditions didn’t mimic those faced by Russian Jewish politicians during the 1905 Revolution, when mass followings could be easily mustered, but *The Way*’s leading figures prove increasingly insensitive to others’ feelings and needs. They stubbornly forgo opportunities for greater self-knowledge and development of more effective strategies for group mobilization.

Zifroviz’s emigration from Palestine has been marshaled to demonstrate his flawed character, but viewed less ideologically, one sees him serving as a critical but realistic portrayal of the type of human material available for the realization of early twentieth-century Palestinian Zionist aims that the trilogy looks to mobilize.<sup>59</sup> Zifroviz’s immigration to Palestine and his affiliation with *The Way* indicate an incipient connection to the Palestinian Zionist project, akin to the one Funk maintains, as well as a readiness to work with other men for its realization. Although Zifroviz’s advanced age (thirty-five years old), balding head, limited physical strength, hypochondria, and erotic timidity differentiate him from Funk and evoke the *talush* or uprooted figure viewed as the polar opposite of the New Hebrew, these differences prove superficial.<sup>60</sup>

Turn-of-the-century Hebrew prose’s dominant character type, the *talush* feels severed from traditional east European Jewish society by the forces of Enlightenment, secularization, and embourgeoisement, and impeded from integrating into general European society by lingering aspects of his ethnoreligious past. In accordance with this definition, Zifroviz and other Palestinian Zionist figures, including Funk, could be viewed as *telushim* searching for rootedness

57. On the New Yishuv in the Late Ottoman Period see Arieh Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

58. Aharon Reuveni, *Be-raishit ha-mevukhah*, 24–25.

59. For a dispassionate study of early twentieth-century Palestinian Jewish immigrants see Gur Alroey, *Immigrantim: ha-hagirah ha-yehudit le-'erez yisra'el be-raishit ha-me'ah ha-'esrim* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi, 2004).

60. The uprooted figure shares many characteristics with anti-Semitic caricatures of the modern Jewish male. For English language treatments of the *talush* see Nurit Govrin *Alienation and Regeneration* (Tel Aviv: MOD Books, 1989), 11–30; David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1984), 143–149; Shelia E. Jelen, *Intimations of Difference* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 1–25. For more recent scholarship questioning this category’s usefulness for understanding the complex ways turn-of-the-century Hebrew literature employed gender and sexuality see Pinsker, *Literary Passports*, 169–184.



in Palestine, but Zifroviz and Funk lack the intellectual and social independence typical of uprooted figures who emerge from the Jewish intelligentsia's ranks.<sup>61</sup>

Instead of producing Jewish ideas or art that would encourage an intricate portrayal of his unique and expansive interiority, Zifroviz searches for ideas and art to consume. Thus he devoutly reads the leading contemporary Hebrew intellectual journal *Ha-shiloah*, and looks to develop social ties with the writers of *The Way*, whom he idolizes. Zifroviz, like Funk, lacks grandiose aspirations. His primary goals are a stable livelihood, a home, and a wife with whom to share them. His accounting job and his engagement show him working to achieve these goals, and, rather than undermining his Zionist commitment, these banal goals actually push him to more active political involvement in the hope of strengthening his economic position and his erotic ties.<sup>62</sup>

A follower, Zifroviz, like Funk, represents the Jewish masses that the Zionist avant-garde needed to mobilize to realize its aims. This inability to effectively muster Jewish men to its cause constitutes the avant-garde's primary failure, and it underlies the Yishuv's failed wartime response detailed in *'Ad Yerushalayim*. Zifroviz allies himself with *The Way*'s intellectuals, because he is literally searching for "the way" to realize his personal aims. Yet these intellectuals completely dismiss him, preferring to obscure their similarities to him. Consequently, rather than asserting normative masculine standards intended to advance communal objectives, they, like other Yishuv members, traffic in standards that belittle Zifroviz and others like him and push them away from community-building efforts.

Megalomaniacally viewing themselves as the inchoate New Yishuv's principal policy makers, Hayim Ram and Givoni unilaterally center the Yishuv's response to war on full adoption of Ottoman citizenship. Worried about their and their families' well-being, however, immigrant Jews see it as prudent to maintain loyalty to their original countries, which provide them with extraterritorial protection, and hesitate to renounce previous citizenships. Yet Ram and Givoni fail to address their concerns. The perceived strategic value of Ottoman citizenship blinds them. They never consider the perspective of their policy's potential victims. Such consideration requires introspection and confrontation with long-suppressed feelings of weakness and doubt similar to those felt by ordinary Yishuv men. It could also help Ram and Givoni explain why no other option exists—something that can help their argument achieve a prominent position in the Yishuv's rational-critical discourse about the general interest.

Ram and other purported Zionist leaders' failure to effectively communicate their ideas and persuade their audience explains the failure of their mobilization efforts:

Ram's words didn't disperse his doubts' clouds. That Ram and other members of *The Way* were prepared to cast down their lives for their ideals wasn't a surprise to him. Surely they'd done that their whole lives. They took it upon themselves. And

61. Miron, *Kivun 'orot*, 407.

62. Reuveni, *Be-raishit ha-mevukhah*, 25.

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yet—it wasn’t very consoling. He couldn’t and didn’t want to take part in public matters. He didn’t desire to sacrifice himself and he didn’t demand that others sacrifice themselves for him. His only desire was that they’d allow him to live in peace. He didn’t demand anything more. And as it concerned Manyah. . . .<sup>63</sup>

Seeing no connection between the self-sacrificial masculine norm Ram asserts and his desire for a healthy sexual relationship with his fiancée Manyah, which he sees as a lynchpin of a better life, Zifroviz dismisses Ram. By not clarifying societal expectations and the type of future they could make possible for Yishuv men, Ram fails to advance masculine norms, especially those demanding less draconian forms of sacrifice, among uncertain and sexually reticent men like Zifroviz, who find action difficult.

### GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND NOVELISTIC ASSERTION OF COMMUNAL BOUNDARIES

Unlike *The Way*’s writers, Reuveni elucidates a basic normative standard for Yishuv membership he considered most conducive to its development. Zifroviz and Funk’s failure to effectively advance individual and collective aims exposes individual human weakness as an insurmountable aspect of modern life. Recognition of this fact, Reuveni believed, proved necessary for individuals facing shameful feelings brought on by repeated failure. Rather than concealing feelings of weakness and shame and letting them defeat or paralyze you, Reuveni saw the need to confront them and try to move beyond them. By doing this Yishuv men could potentially better their lives and the lives of others. He therefore worked to redefine shameful behavior.

Interested in promoting coordinated efforts capable of assisting individuals in succeeding at things they had failed at in isolation, Reuveni severed the link between lack of success and shame. He defined shameful behavior as a failure to participate in the struggle against individual and collective Jewish weakness, which he placed at the heart of virtue’s redefinition. Not only could this definition best advance collective aims, association with others acting in accordance with this standard and ostracization of those rejecting it offered participants an esprit de corps capable of endowing their individual lives with greater meaning and pleasure, independent of the realization of collective aims.

To make this standard of virtue legible to readers, Reuveni employs the figure of Leyzer Wetstein to link unwillingness to struggle against individual and collective Jewish weakness with negative representations of homosexuality and effeminacy. To understand how this works, one must remember that the trilogy rejects the possibility of a “healthy” masculine New Hebrew wholly free of decadent attitudes and behaviors. It doesn’t employ homosexuality and heterosexuality as fixed identities. Rather it treats them as malleable identities representing different points along a continuum charting the ways that men relate one to another. Therefore Palestinian Jewish men maintain a fluid identity capable of moving both towards and away from “homosexual” points on the homosocial continuum. Yet they maintain an internalized fear of being placed in the stigmatized

63. Reuveni, *Be-rashit ha-mevukhah*, 151.

category of “homosexual.” Thus the text employs a strategy known as “homosexual panic” to use this fear to promote individual and collective struggles against Jewish weakness, as well as the introspection necessary for these struggles’ success.<sup>64</sup> If such normatively acceptable action isn’t taken, those who don’t embrace it are placed at the stigmatized margins far from healthy male Zionists. If employed effectively, homosexual panic uses social pressure to push men like Funk and Zifroviz towards the achievement of individual and collective aims, while ostracizing those like Leyzer who shirk such behavior and act like “homosexuals.”

Despite their differences, Funk, Zifroviz, and Brechuk sense feelings of weakness similar to those felt by Leyzer. Nonetheless, their struggles against them, as well as accompanying feelings of guilt and shame, differentiate them from Leyzer, who guiltlessly and shamelessly embraces his weakness, thereby voicing the type of broader communal boundaries Reuveni advocated. Leyzer’s lack of empathy and identification with others underlies his behavior. As his scornful attitude to his aged grandfather Zalman, who symbolizes the Old Yishuv’s former moral and social vigor, shows, Leyzer senses little connection to this community. Yet Leyzer doesn’t exhibit loyalty to the New Yishuv or the Ottoman Empire. Thus when looking to lighten the burden of Ottoman military service, he sardonically caricatures his weak and oppressed fellow soldiers to entertain his superiors.

The social disconnection and disregard for others’ impressions and needs prevent the emergence of feelings of shame, guilt, and weakness, and typify Leyzer’s character; the trilogy graphically portrays his homosexuality and effeminacy to stigmatize such attributes. Leyzer’s engagement in anal sex with his male superiors proves central to these stigmatizing efforts; his flirtatious speech and his hand and facial gestures, which resemble those of a female Arab prostitute, point to an effeminacy and powerful homosexual desire that mark his sexual activity as consensual. Only when frequent intercourse results in syphilitic sores requiring medical intervention does Leyzer desert. While his wounds heal, Leyzer retains his earlier mannerisms and looks to women for satisfaction of his sexual needs. Yet even his girlfriend Rosa comes to see his effeminacy as abhorrent and his desire for sexual domination unseemly. Rather than being shamed by Rosa’s critique, Leyzer merely turns to another woman to engage his fantasies of anal sex with Ottoman officers.<sup>65</sup>

Leyzer’s combination of effeminacy and homosexuality with cravenness and disloyalty promotes a negative Jewish male image similar to the one racial anti-Semites advanced as a countertype to “healthy” national manhood, but *‘Ad Yerushalayim* doesn’t portray Leyzer’s identity as a manifestation of his Jewish

64. Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 89.

65. Reuveni, *Shamot*, 155 and 160; for Leyzer’s comparison to a female Arab prostitute see *ibid.*, 29; for reference to Leyzer as a male prostitute see *ibid.*, 42; for discussion of his survival in the army at others’ expense see *ibid.*, 59.

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essence.<sup>66</sup> Zionists, such as Reuveni, who were aware of the anti-Semitic image of the Jew, challenged such essentialism, arguing that integration into a social framework promoting healthy norms could even transform somebody as loathsome as Leyzer. No Jew was doomed to degeneracy and suffering.

### TOWARDS ENGAGED LITERATURE—INTROSPECTION, PERFORMATIVE IDENTITY, HOMOSOCIALITY

With politicians like those who work for *The Way* unable to effectively draw New Yishuv affiliates together for collective action, Reuveni asserts the need for Hebrew writers to assume this role. The development of intimate mutual relations between Palestinian Zionists could create an affection that would promote the type of collective action absent from the New Yishuv’s wartime response. Yet, to do so, Hebrew writers had to abandon autonomous conceptions of art. Rather than employing art for escape, Hebrew writers needed to promote self-knowledge, the creation of pleasurable and productive homosocial relations, and collective action through literature.<sup>67</sup> While critics assert that Reuveni based Brenchuk on himself, Brenchuk’s biographical similarity to Reuveni, as well as his contemporary Brenner, shouldn’t distract readers from the critical distance Reuveni employs in Brenchuk’s depiction.<sup>68</sup> Through his portrayal of Brenchuk, a skilled writer whose social limitations prevent him from creating engaged literature, Reuveni further elucidates his aesthetics.

In contrast with Zifroviz and Funk, Brenchuk possesses a keen intellect and sharp observational and analytical skills. Nonetheless he fails to engage them for either individual or collective betterment. Brenchuk perceptively notes “that the line that separated him and Zifroviz was a very thin line—so thin that it frequently was completely erased and no longer visible to the eye.”<sup>69</sup> Yet he doesn’t address this similarity’s social significance. Instead, judging himself against history’s Nietzschean great men, Brenchuk finds his and Zifroviz’s weakness shameful. To avoid such painful awareness, Brenchuk creates a seemingly autonomous art that produces reassuring feelings of vitality. Eventually this art becomes a hard

66. On racial anti-Semitism and its rhetoric see Sander Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (New York: Routledge, 1991); John Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-De-Siècle Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Mitchell Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). On “healthy” masculinity’s connection to nationalism see Mosse, *The Image of Man*; George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

67. For an important statement of the need for Hebrew literature to assist its readers in the achievement of self-knowledge see Yosef Hayyim Brenner “Ha’arakhat ‘azmeinu bi-shloshah krakhim,” in *Ktavim*, ed. Menaḥem Poznanski, vol. 4 (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Ha-po’alim, 1978–1986), 1223–1296.

68. Shaked, *Ha-sipporet ha-ivrit 1880–1980*, 1:144; Abramson, *Hebrew Writing*, 263.

69. Reuveni, *Be-raishit ha-mevukhah*, 152.

insulating shell employed to protect him from seemingly threatening relationships and external stimuli.<sup>70</sup>

In contrast with Brenchuk's expectations, his isolation following the Ottoman declaration of war leads to writer's block and a confrontation with the bankruptcy of his escapist aesthetics. His stalled writing becomes like a Sisyphean boulder "used to pave a wide smooth path that neither departed nor led to a settlement. An indistinct path—flat, wide, dead, in the middle of the wasteland."<sup>71</sup> Since it fails to provide a starting point, a destination, or a compelling reason to travel the path it helps readers perceive, Brenchuk's writing doesn't serve anybody. Nonetheless, the metaphor hints that through production of a wide path through the wilderness Hebrew literature could provide everyday Palestinian Jews with a meaningful collective response to their travails that could help fulfill their goals. Embrace of such a literary approach, however, requires that Brenchuk remove his protective shell and experience life.

When Brenchuk exposes himself he attains increased self-knowledge that leads towards a new life and new aesthetics:

Inside the peel sat a different man, simple and small, and seemingly composed of mercury. Truthfully it wasn't a man at all, it was scattered drops of mercury that rolled around without any resting place, separating and scattering in all directions before again meeting and joining into one body of living trembling silver.<sup>72</sup>

Here Brenchuk painfully confronts his fractured sense of self. Yet this confrontation reveals a vital and infinitely malleable interior world harnessable for individual and communal betterment. Acting like a "body of living trembling silver," Brenchuk can overcome feelings of stagnancy, but he needs to accept his and fellow Yishuv members' limitations before he can do so.

When massive locust swarms hit Palestine, the resulting crisis advances Brenchuk's thinking about Yishuv members' limitations. Instead of comprehending the situation through the lens of the eighth plague wrought by God on Pharaoh or the plague of locusts used to voice God's wrath in Joel 2, Brenchuk critically examines it through rational thought. He investigates the locust's physiognomy. Its vitality and determinedness strike him and get him thinking about the Yishuv. Brenchuk previously scorned herd-like individuals incapable of elevating themselves above the crowd, but he is forced to reconsider. Despite their tiny intellects and individual vulnerability, the locusts' coordinated efforts prove nearly unstoppable. Similarly, a national community could accomplish even daunting tasks if its affiliates shared a common goal and disregarded personal limitations to work towards its realization.

70. For reference to Brenchuk's art as a hard peel see Reuveni, *Ha-'oniyot ha-'ahronot*, 19; for impotent feelings caused by interpersonal relations see *ibid.*, 5.

71. Reuveni, *Ha-'oniyot ha-'ahronot*, 31.

72. Reuveni, *Ha-'oniyot ha-'ahronot*, 20.

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Building upon his insight, Brenchuk departs Jerusalem to join coordinated efforts to combat the locusts’ spread. During these efforts he meets Funk, who shares a similar commitment to the crisis-stricken Yishuv; this commitment sparks the men’s mutual admiration and attraction. Physical attraction enhances the relationship, but, rather than devolving into Leyzer-like asocial behavior, Brenchuk and Funk’s mutual attraction strengthens their resolve and pushes them to work together to improve communal conditions. Even though they spend weeks digging pits where the locust larvae are pushed and buried alive, the physically taxing labor doesn’t disturb them. Instead their time together proves to be one of their lives’ most pleasurable periods: “Nothing happened, nothing out of the ordinary. Nevertheless that day shined in their memory like a bright ray of light amidst the remaining gray days of the year.”<sup>73</sup> Brenchuk’s experience reveals that even when confronting difficult conditions a shared path and a common destination offer men a way of transcending their feelings of stagnancy regardless of their ultimate fate.

### DELETERIOUS MALE FRIENDSHIP, LACK OF REGULATORY FICTION, AND COMMUNAL STAGNANCY

Rather than voicing important insights derived from his experience, Brenchuk doesn’t realize his literary potential. Without promulgated masculine heterosexual norms or the presence of like-minded Jewish men, Brenchuk squanders the “feeling of great wealth [that] beats in his heart” following participation in collective survival efforts.<sup>74</sup> Falling prey to asocial influences, Brenchuk reverts to his earlier aesthetics and distances himself from self-affirming activities. Thus, the trilogy ends ominously, with Brenchuk sharing the company of the Viennese Jewish bank clerk Anselmus Mayer, with whom he maintains a homosexually tinged relationship symbolic of their problematic friendship. Brenchuk quickly gravitates from healthy heterosexuality towards deviant homosexuality.

Instead of pushing Brenchuk towards self-improvement, Mayer goads him towards inaction and derivation of masochistic pleasure from his perceived failure to meet artificial masculine standards.<sup>75</sup> When unable to write, Brenchuk suffers from low self-esteem. He sees himself as a physically repulsive figure lacking cultured charm and sexual magnetism. Consequently he finds Mayer striking. His superficial human warmth, masculine charisma, and simple intellectual curiosity attract Brenchuk and turn Mayer into an object of emulation. Yet, rather than looking inward and informing his friend that they share similar deficiencies best addressed through collective improvement efforts, Mayer basks in Brenchuk’s adulation and projects his feelings of weakness onto him. Furthermore, critique of Brenchuk’s deficiencies provides Mayer with sadistic pleasure. Aware of Brenchuk’s concealment of sexual insecurities behind Victorian sexual mores, Mayer sets him up with women to watch him squirm. Similarly, rather

73. Reuveni, *Ha-'oniyot ha-'ahronot*, 99.

74. Reuveni, *Ha-'oniyot ha-'ahronot*, 105.

75. For more on the two men’s relationship see Shvarz, *Lihyot kedey lihyot*, 211.

than helping Brenchuk cope with his sense of physical repulsiveness, Mayer enjoys repeating hurtful comments made about his appearance. Despite the pain Mayer inflicts on him, Brenchuk has difficulty staying away. He derives masochistic pleasure from Mayer's company, just as a "frozen wanderer" enjoys "being showered by warm water."<sup>76</sup>

Mayer and Brenchuk's sadomasochistic relationship maintains itself throughout the trilogy, but, rather than manifesting itself physically, it finds voice in Brenchuk's uncomfortable attempts to mimic his friend's misogynistic and hedonistic standards to gain approval. Yet, even before heading off to combat the locust plague, Brenchuk challenges his friend's worldview and displays openness to alternative moral standards. Mayer pushes him to use his narrative skills for seduction. Initially Brenchuk refuses, but, when Manyah Appelbaum invites him back to her apartment, the temptation proves too strong. Dissatisfied when she refuses his sexual advances, Brenchuk quells her resistance by telling her salacious stories that sexually arouse her. Yet, on the verge of sexual conquest, Brenchuk steps back. Taking greater pleasure in controlling his desire than giving it hedonistic expression, Brenchuk leaves her room and temporarily emerges from Mayer's shadow. Brenchuk's socially conscious behavior allows him to simultaneously express his heterosexuality and a proper masculine self-restraint.

Like Brenchuk, the New Yishuv's other men can express themselves in accordance with communally supportive masculine standards. With such standards absent during the war, *'Ad Yerushalayim*, unlike Brenchuk's novel, works to disseminate them to better conditions in the New Yishuv. Yet such promulgation required introspective authors capable of publicly addressing personal deficiencies in support of normative change and public discussion about the best ways for a unified Palestinian Zionist community to achieve its collective aims. As Reuveni's portrayal of Brenchuk intends to show, the works of authors unwilling to adopt such a socially engaged aesthetic would reveal their questionable character and irrelevance. Reuveni looked to his Hebrew literary counterparts to help him take up an important social project neglected by their political contemporaries.

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Earlier discussions of Israeli society and culture's prestate development have portrayed it as a seamless process advanced through the development of new prototypes of Jewish manhood with little precedent in diasporic Jewish life, and the invention of new customs promoting territorialization of the Jewish people. Since early twentieth-century Palestinian Hebrew literature didn't accord with this portrayal, its role in social and cultural development went largely unaddressed. Examination of this literature, especially works of Hebrew fiction portrayed as decadent, points to a more gradual and contested development process, including a widespread debate of what constituted Zionist masculinity and what would advance Jewish collective interests. Furthermore,

76. Reuveni, *Ha-'oniyot ha-'ahronot*, 22.



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such study could draw attention to sexuality and gender’s prominent role in cultural and societal development, as well as Hebrew literature’s role in helping immigrants address existential conundrums inhibiting their participation in collective efforts.

Rather than supporting assertions that facile imitation of non-Jewish manhood ideals produced Zionist norms, *‘Ad Yerushalayim* points to widespread contemporary debate about normative Zionist masculinity. More interested in social mobilization than individual pride, Reuveni challenged those who advanced the Nietzschean superman or the individual ready to sacrifice his life for the collective as viable exemplars for Palestinian Jewish men. Rather than focusing on undesirable or unachievable masculine ideals, Reuveni saw the need to address the contemporary state of Jewish men. What unified them, he believed, was a sense of psychic fragmentation and feelings of individual and collective weakness. Reuveni, however, didn’t view psychic fragmentation as insurmountable and weakness as an insuperable part of Jewish male identity. Instead he intuited Jewish masculinity’s performative nature and saw it as a way to draw Jewish men together to combat actual Jewish male weaknesses and achieve individual and collective betterment.

Recognizing the anxiety and torpor widespread among Palestinian Jewish men, through the trilogy, Reuveni advanced a masculine ideal intended to force “these men to overcome their inherent inertia and fearfulness and to ‘work,’ both in the sense of expending energy and in the sense of being efficient or ‘serviceable’ in doing so.”<sup>77</sup> Transmission of this ideal, however, required the redefinition of virtue. Diasporic failures and humiliations had scarred immigrant Jewish men and left them ashamed of their limited ability to individually and collectively better their lives. Consequently Reuveni rejected extant Jewish definitions of virtue and redefined it as participation in a joint struggle against psychic fragmentation and its deleterious effects. Participation in this struggle could combat a man’s feelings of shame and mark him as a healthy male, but also motivate him to meet the community’s provisioning, procreative, and protective needs.

A community of like-minded Jewish men virtuously working to promote the New Yishuv constituted an ideal scenario for Reuveni, but he remained aware that a combination of fear, inertia, self-interest, and shame inhibited Palestinian Jewish men’s advancement of communal interests. Hence he employed sexuality alongside gender in *‘Ad Yerushalayim* to mark out communal boundaries. He categorized the struggle against psychic fragmentation and its damaging effects by means of introspection and communal improvement efforts as healthy heterosexual behavior, and portrayed the shirking of these efforts as deviant homosexual conduct rendering a man unsuitable for the New Yishuv. The trilogy’s extensive portrayal of aberrant sexuality serves to demarcate proper social behavior and assert social pressure on Palestinian Jewish men seeking other Jewish men’s company. Not only did proper deportment provide entrée into New

77. Gilmore, *Manhood in the Making*, 227.

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Yishuv society, it conferred membership in a select group that Jewish men could take pride in even if they didn't live to see its goals' realization.

At *'Ad Yerushalayim's* conclusion, the type of masculine heterosexual behavior necessary for the New Yishuv's advancement is missing, and the New Yishuv's future remains uncertain; thus, Reuveni shifts responsibility to contemporary male readers. If readers recognized this responsibility, assumed the masculine and heterosexual norms the trilogy asserts, and maintained these norms as the basis for New Yishuv membership, *'Ad Yerushalayim* made an important contribution to Palestinian Zionist culture. Such a direct link between the trilogy and its readers, however, will likely never be located. Nonetheless *'Ad Yerushalayim* points to Reuveni's belief that contemporary conditions demanded that Hebrew writers exploit gender and sexuality to pave a way for Palestinian Jewish unity and an improved collective Jewish future.

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