

# The Power of Writing from the Margins

## Assessing Rachel Morpurgo, the First Hebrew Woman Poet

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*Rachel Morpurgo, née Luzzatto, of Trieste (1790–1871) was the first woman to leave a corpus of poems in Hebrew. Her poems and letters—some published during her lifetime, others found after her death by her daughter—were collected and published posthumously in 1890 by Isaac Hayyim Castiglioni, also of Trieste, in a book he entitled ‘Ugav Raḥel (Rachel’s Harp). Despite Morpurgo’s relative fame among her contemporaries, she failed to earn the appreciation of historians of modern Hebrew literature. Only during the last two decades have a number of women scholars started to discover the complexity of the first woman poet to write in Hebrew and her poetry. This article attempts to answer two central questions that have not previously been addressed: Which circumstances explain the emergence of Morpurgo in Trieste, some thirty years before the first Hebrew women poets in eastern Europe? and What was unique about Morpurgo’s writing, compared to other writers of her time? To answer the first, a connection will be drawn between the poet’s development, her sociocultural circumstances (Italian–Jewish culture, the special nature of the Triestian Haskalah) and her family of origin, the Luzzattos. To answer the second, her poetic technique will be defined in terms of the techniques of palimpsest and Re-Vision. These make her poetry unique and reflect the painful comprehension of her marginal position, determined by her gender, in the world of Jewish learning. Understanding her feeling of marginality and the way in which she overcame it by employing sophisticated poetic techniques enables us both to decipher her enigmatic poems and understand her position in the history of Hebrew literature.*

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How to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path?

— GILLES DELEUZE AND FELIX GUATTARI, *KAFKA*

An extraordinary and unknown star shimmered in the skies of the central European republic of the Haskalah in the mid-nineteenth century when a Hebrew poem written by a woman appeared in the eighth issue (1847) of the Viennese Haskalah journal *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq* (*The Stars of Isaac*).<sup>1</sup> The poem, “And this is Rachel’s Answer,” had been written by Rachel Morpurgo to her cousin Samuel David Luzzatto (Shadal) some thirty years earlier.<sup>2</sup> This was not a one-time occurrence; each issue of *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq* up until 1856 featured at least one poem by Morpurgo, some on the journal’s first page.

Rachel Morpurgo, née Luzzatto, of Trieste (1790–1871) was the first woman to leave behind a corpus of poems in Hebrew. Her poems and letters—some published during her lifetime, others found in her home after her death by her daughter—were collected and published posthumously in 1890 by Isaac Ḥayyim Castiglioni, also of Trieste, in a book he entitled *‘Ugav Raḥel* (*Rachel’s Harp*).<sup>3</sup> Despite Morpurgo’s relative fame among her contemporaries, she failed to earn the appreciation of historians of modern Hebrew literature, who treated her more as a curiosity than a poet of serious literary value. Portents of this somewhat condescending approach were apparent in the reactions to her writings voiced by Haskalah scholars of her own time. Although they were impressed by the phenomenon of a woman Hebrew poet, to whom some even composed poems of praise, they in fact ignored her literary skills.<sup>4</sup> The poems that admire the fact she wrote Hebrew poetry fail to relate to the poems themselves, a tendency which is also characteristic of Morpurgo’s contemporary biographers.<sup>5</sup> Joseph Klausner, who reluctantly (as one might sense from his tone) devoted a brief chapter to Morpurgo in his multivolume *History of Modern Hebrew Literature (1785–1930)*, adopted the same tone and remarked on “the weakness of her poetic writing.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Yisrael Zemorah, in his preface to a second edition of *‘Ugav Raḥel* (1943), dismissed the value of her poetry, as has Dan Miron more recently, who designates her a “rhymester” and “curiosity” and refuses to consider her to be the first Hebrew woman poet.<sup>7</sup>

Attitudes to Morpurgo’s poetry have begun to change of late, principally thanks to a number of women scholars.<sup>8</sup> Their research has demonstrated that her poetry expresses the complex identity of a *maskilah* poet who is deeply religious and extremely well versed in canonical Jewish texts but at the same time protests against the exclusion of women from the hegemonic center of Jewish scholarship and

society. Two central questions have not yet been addressed. Which circumstances explain the emergence of Morpurgo in Trieste, a Jewish community situated on the margins of the Haskalah movement, some thirty years before the first Hebrew women poets in eastern Europe? and What was unique about Morpurgo's writing compared to other writers of her time—or, in the terms of literary ecology, what was her “ecological niche,” her unique use of the cultural resources at her disposal?<sup>9</sup> This article explores these questions sequentially.

### THE BACKGROUND TO MORPURGO'S DEVELOPMENT AS A POET: CULTURE, SOCIETY, AND FAMILY

In traditional Jewish society, women had to overcome especially difficult obstacles when trying to realize whatever literary potential they possessed. Like other women throughout Europe, they were denied the education, independence, and appreciation that artists need for their development.<sup>10</sup> In addition, because they were forbidden to study Torah, they were also denied knowledge of Hebrew, the “holy tongue,” necessary only for the study of canonical Hebrew texts. Hence they were denied access to the very language of Jewish hegemonic culture and art and, by extension, excluded from participating in the cultural-literary revolution of the Hebrew Haskalah movement.<sup>11</sup> Not until the mid-nineteenth century, in the second and third generation of the Haskalah, did a few young Jewish women in Eastern Europe manage to break through this barrier. That Morpurgo (then Luzzatto) had done so a generation earlier may be explained by the fact that, in addition to her unique linguistic and literary talents, the sociocultural environment in which she lived was somewhat more open to Hebrew education for girls. This was the case both in the public sphere of Italian Jewry and in the private sphere of the Luzzatto family.

#### *The Undercurrent of Jewish Women's Education: The Public Sphere*

Writing in the mid-twentieth century, Cecil Roth declared that the Renaissance in Italy was “an anticipation of the movement for the emancipation of women,” and that, consequently, in his view, the education then given to girls in Italy was molded in the image of boys' education.<sup>12</sup> A subsequent generation of historians challenged

Roth's claim, arguing that, although a few women were known for their cultural achievements, Italian Jewry generally adhered to conservative norms that elsewhere consigned women to the margins of Jewish society and culture.<sup>13</sup>

There is also no consensus among historians regarding the Hebrew-Jewish education of Jewish women in Italy, perhaps because the situation was complex. In general, as Howard Adelman and Ilan Fuchs point out, women in Italy, as elsewhere, were excluded from Hebrew-Torah education by means of both Jewish law and custom.<sup>14</sup> Even so, there appears to have existed an undercurrent unique to Italian Jewry that made women's Jewish-Hebrew education possible. This undercurrent first became apparent with the education of a few individual daughters of upper-class families during the Renaissance, a development that may have supplied role models for subsequent generations, especially—but not exclusively—among the families of the Jewish elite. Subsequent evidence, from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, provides hints of a favorable stance toward the study of Torah by women, which are supplemented by indications that girls were taught sacred texts at home by tutors or fathers. The shift culminates in evidence of actual women scholars. Simcha Assaf has unearthed several sources attesting to women in Italy who knew Hebrew and studied Torah, and Tali Brenner describes the phenomenon unique to Italy of women ritual slaughterers and women who taught in "Talmud Torah" schools for boys.<sup>15</sup>

I suggest, then, that the society and mindset of Italian Jewry allowed for the option of a woman to be knowledgeable in Torah at various levels, even though that was neither the official position of Jewish law nor the accepted hegemonic practice. Because traditional Jewish education included systematic teaching of the Hebrew language in addition to the canonical Judaic texts, it can be assumed that women not only received a Jewish education but also acquired some knowledge of the Hebrew language.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Morpurgo's Hebrew-Torah education, as exceptional as it was in the breadth of its scope, was not viewed as an outright assault on Italian-Jewish social convention, especially among elite families. This might also explain the fact that there were at least three other women in Morpurgo's immediate circle who knew Hebrew well: her cousins Tamar and Rachel Luzzatto (to whom Rachel Morpurgo wrote poems in Hebrew) and Flora Randegger, who translated the Passover Haggadah into Italian.<sup>17</sup>

Also instrumental in Morpurgo's development was the unique cultural expanse of the Jewish community in which she grew up. In the nineteenth century, Trieste was the Habsburg Empire's principal port, a cosmopolitan and vibrant city, and one of the few places in Europe where Jews had attained a measure of civic equality. As Lois Dobin shows in her comprehensive study of the Trieste Jewish community, the city had been declared a "free port" early in the eighteenth century by Emperor Charles VI (1685–1740). His daughter and successor, Maria Theresa (1717–80) deliberately attempted to attract Jewish and Greek traders to Trieste by granting both communities rights that were almost equal to those enjoyed by Catholics, as well as a certain level of autonomy and independence in matters of religion and education. This situation exerted a crucial influence on the development of the Triestian Jewish community's distinctiveness. As Dubin and David Sorkin point out, communities of what they term "port Jews" (Trieste included) were altogether characterized by their relative affinity to the local culture and their view that European culture complemented rather than opposed Jewish culture and religion.<sup>18</sup> Over an extended process of gestation, the way of life of Triestian Jewry came to combine traditional Judaism with modern enlightenment, without experiencing a clash between them. It should come as no surprise, then, that, unlike Jews elsewhere in the Habsburg Empire who vehemently opposed Emperor Joseph II's demands for Jewish acculturation—such as the adoption of German as the language of official documentation and discourse, the taking of family names, or the establishment of schools where the curriculum would include a general education along the lines dictated by Imperial Habsburg decree—the Jews of Trieste evinced no resistance to such moves, many of which they had in any case already incorporated into their daily lives.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, the rabbis of Trieste were the first to respond positively to the educational reforms proposed by Naphtali Herz Wessely's manifesto: *Divrei shalom ve'emet* (*Words of Peace and Truth*).<sup>20</sup>

It is the unique character of the Haskalah of Triestian port Jewry that probably explains why it was there that a connection between Hebrew poetry, general education, religious faith, and the observance of Jewish law was forged. This nexus characterized quite a number of local Hebrew Haskalah poets, including the aforementioned Shadal who, not at all incidentally, was Morpurgo's cousin. I suggest that the same ambience also made possible the appearance of so singular and compound

a phenomenon as a woman who was both extremely devout and learned in Jewish canonical texts and, at the same time, a woman poet of independent opinions who published her works in a maskilic journal.

### *The Family Sphere: From Luzzatto's Support to Morpurgo's Indifference*

It is Shadal who supplies most of the information we possess about Morpurgo's early life.<sup>21</sup> In their childhood, their families lived in the same house, and their respective parents ran a family shop together. Despite belonging to the Luzzatto family, which had raised generations of physicians, philosophers, and poets, the homes in which Rachel and Samuel David grew up were those of merchants and artisans. Nevertheless, as Shadal recalls in his memoirs, the family's intellectual heritage was ever present and influential. Baruch Luzzatto, Rachel's father, "would speak frequently about his father Dr. Isaac and his uncle Dr. Ephraim and from time to time, would read from their poems."<sup>22</sup> Rachel's parents' home also housed a particularly rich library, which Rachel's uncle, David Luzzatto, left to Rachel's brother Isaac.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps Baruch Luzzatto's sense of cultural elitism can explain the fact that, like all heads of the distinguished families of Trieste, he, too, hired private tutors to teach his son Isaac, thus making it possible for the inquisitive and intellectually inclined Rachel to join in the lessons, too.<sup>24</sup> Because the young Rachel was taught together with her brother by the skilled tutors brought to their home, her studies were identical to those of boys, and hence, for a girl, unique in their scope.<sup>25</sup> Her curriculum included the study of the Bible with commentaries, Talmud, classical Jewish philosophy (*Hovot halevavot*, *Menorat hama'or*, *Sefer reishit hokhmah*), and later, *Sefer hazohar*.<sup>26</sup> The duration of Rachel's studies extended beyond that of the other known Hebrew *maskilot*, who after a limited period of instruction by private tutors were left without teachers or a study partner.<sup>27</sup> This was thanks to her shared study with her cousin Samuel David, who became her interlocutor even though he was ten years her junior. In his memoirs, Shadal describes how he continued to frequent his cousin's home even after his family moved away, drawn there both by the library and by his intellectual friendship with Rachel, to which he ascribed great importance.<sup>28</sup> Rachel also benefited from the relationship with her cousin who, like her, took an interest in

Jewish philosophy and in Hebrew language and poetry. In this way, their friendship honed both cousins' scholastic, reflective, and polemical skills.<sup>29</sup>

The combination of a broad Hebrew and Jewish education and willingness on the part of her father and cousin to accept her as an intellectual equal, together with the background of the Luzzatto tradition of poets and poetry, created, I suggest, a unique family environment that made possible Rachel's intellectual growth and her emergence later as a Hebrew poet. However, matters changed dramatically with her marriage to Jacob Morpurgo in 1829. Although the couple and their children continued to live in the home of Rachel's parents for many years,<sup>30</sup> she was now closely surrounded by her husband and children, who were indifferent to her scholarly and creative identity. "Her husband," writes Castiglioni, "found no pleasure in her studies and writings, but rather only in his merchandise." It is not surprising that her children, too, when they grew up, "did not recognize her great value and that her worth was greater than trade in silver."<sup>31</sup>

Castiglioni's reference to the circumstances of Rachel's married life is extraordinary and signifies a departure from contemporary biographical conventions, which invariably skirted intimate details of that nature, especially when speaking of women. It can perhaps best be explained by the significance that Castiglioni attached to this background, a significance that (as will be seen below) also emerges from some of Rachel's own later writings, which contain references to her relationship with her husband that attest to the veracity of Castiglioni's depiction. Especially relevant in this context are the poem that commences "Before I grew old" and a letter in which she compares herself to the biblical figure of Daniel, who dwelled in a lions' den.

Rachel Morpurgo gave in, at least outwardly, to the conventional role demanded by her husband, "and whatever he asked of her, she did for him, and her only goal was to foster and nurture her children who were her pride and joy."<sup>32</sup> She became a housewife whose endless round of daily chores consumed all her time. Morpurgo's fate might consequently have been similar to that of the young Hebrew *maskilot* of eastern Europe in the generation that followed, most of whom disappeared from the public sphere of Haskalah writing after marriage.<sup>33</sup> Morpurgo's life story, however, was distinguished by three elements that, taken together, prevented the disappearance of the first Hebrew woman poet.

The first was the dramatic contrast between her family's support for her intellectual development in the relatively long years of her youth and the indifference, perhaps even hostility, to her studies and writing she encountered after her marriage.<sup>34</sup> This triggered feelings of considerable anger and frustration, which Morpurgo described in a retrospective poem composed twenty years later. In the poem, which begins with the words: "Before I grew old," she compares her husband, whose name was Jacob, to the biblical figure of Laban and herself to the biblical Jacob, thereby providing broad and unmistakable hints of a mutual relationship of hostility.<sup>35</sup> She also presents her husband's treatment of her as the reason for her extended literary silence: "With Laban I lived, and therefore was late / Telling myself, this pain will end / I deliberated, hid my book, / concealed my pen, and said, 'Turn away'."<sup>36</sup> Feminist critics view female anger as a major source of women's creativity, and perhaps this was also the case with respect to Morpurgo.<sup>37</sup> Her artistic activity may have enabled her to channel her frustration, which in turn acted as a motivation for her return to writing.

Significantly—and this is the second unique element of her development—even during her so-called latent years Morpurgo secretly kept the embers of scholarship and creativity burning: "When she was unable to sleep," recalled her daughter, "she would arise from her bed in the middle of the night to write a few lines so as not to forget them," and she allowed herself "to pursue her studies [...] on Rosh Hodesh [the New Moon] when she did not do needlework."<sup>38</sup> Evidence that she managed to retain her intellectual vitality is provided by the three poems she wrote during this period, and by the manuscript of a letter to Shadal (written in a mixture of Italian and Hebrew) in which she, with great erudition and in apparently great haste, keenly interprets lines from the poetry of her grandfather Isaac Luzzatto that Shadal had asked her to help him decipher.<sup>39</sup>

Morpurgo's complex situation—her anger and frustration, on the one hand, and her continued clandestine intellectual activity, on the other—would not have developed into her rebirth as a poet, in my view, if not for her continued relationship with Shadal, which, I suggest, constitutes the third unique feature of Morpurgo's poetic biography. Shadal kept two poems that she had sent him before her marriage and, in 1847, he passed them on to Mendel Stern, the editor of *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq*, who published them that same year in issues 8 and 10 of his periodical. It is reasonable

to assume that Stern's decision to publish was influenced by the fact that the poems were written by a cousin of Shadal, a well-known scholar and a friend, and sent by him. Shadal indeed continued to be a main connection between Morpurgo and *Kokhvei Yitshaq* and sent Stern more of her poems in the coming years, even when she established her own connections with Stern. Thus, the Luzzatto family connection, which had initially opened the door of Hebrew literacy, Torah learning, and poetic education to Morpurgo, also gained her occasional entry to the public sphere from which she was generally excluded.

### MARGINALITY AS A SOURCE OF A NOVEL POETIC LANGUAGE

Rachel Morpurgo knew full well that the publication of her poems did not imply that she had been accepted into the Haskalah community as a poet of equal rank. In her poems, she attributed her continued marginality to her gender, and I believe this viewpoint provides a key to understanding two of the most outstanding literary techniques that she employed: I will term the first technique "palimpsestic," or creating a two layered text, and the second "Re-Vision," by which I mean rereading canonical texts from a feminine perspective.

The term "palimpsest," which describes Morpurgo's technique, has been employed by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar to define the intricate writing practice employed by several major women writers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. According to Gilbert and Gubar, these women succumbed to societal expectations that they write "appropriate" feminine texts but nevertheless refused to forego making their own authentic and subversive voice heard. So they wrote dual-layered texts, "works whose surface designs conceal or obscure deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning."<sup>40</sup>

I suggest that many of Morpurgo's poems are likewise dual-layered texts, hiding a "less socially acceptable level of meaning." They appear on a first, superficial reading to be poems "suitable" for a modest Jewish woman who submissively accepts being shunted to the margins. Yet this socially acceptable surface conceals another level of submerged meaning, one that gives voice to the poet's sense of double marginality; in addition to being opposed to the tendencies toward assimilation that were becoming prevalent in Trieste Jewish society, she is also well aware

and deeply disturbed by the marginal status imposed on her by the fact that she is a woman in an emphatically patriarchal Jewish world.<sup>41</sup> This dual sense of marginality is, I suggest, the consequence of Rachel's complex religious identity. On the one hand, her deep sense of religiosity dictates her lifestyle, the boundaries of her cultural activity and the attachment to national introversion that inspires her fierce opposition to assimilation. On the other hand, however, her self-perception as a learned woman and intellectual, and as a religious personality equal to men, leads to her reject outright the way in which the hegemonic world of traditional Jewish religion and culture marginalizes women and thus consigns her, too, to its peripheries.<sup>42</sup>

A decryption of the hidden layer of a palimpsest poem by Morpurgo should begin by identifying it as such, because not all of her poems were dual layered. One aid to identification is provided by the enigmatic nature of the entire poem, or an important line in it, which causes the reader to sense that he or she has not fully comprehended the text, whose decipherment requires further effort. Morpurgo's palimpsest poems can also be recognized by the extraordinary density of their references to canonical Jewish literature. Such references require the reader not simply to recognize the source (usually biblical) of the allusion cited in the poem, but also to recall its wider textual context, such as the verses by which it is preceded and followed.<sup>43</sup> Thereafter, the reader is expected to join all the various contexts together. Only once that task is accomplished, and the underlying stratum of the palimpsest thus uncovered, will the poem be decrypted and its hidden message of protest revealed.

Had Morpurgo wished only to articulate her awareness of her growing marginality vis-à-vis secularization and assimilation in her community, she could easily have appropriated into her poetry a wide variety of biblical texts that expressly voice social criticism.<sup>44</sup> But that technique would not suffice when, as was frequently the case, her purpose was to protest against the marginality of women in Jewish tradition. All the Hebrew texts she could cite were written by men and for men and therefore expressed masculine experiences and worlds.<sup>45</sup> Hence, to serve her purposes Morpurgo uses the second technique mentioned above: She rereads canonical texts from a feminine perspective, a technique that Adrienne Rich terms "Re-Vision": a "reading anew of the androcentric culture from a feminine viewpoint."<sup>46</sup> Such a reading will often be a resisting reading, because it runs counter to the original intention of the text, but

it supplies the reader-writer with a language that is both hegemonic-traditional and new: it expresses the identity of the female self who is situated at the margins of the hegemony, a figure until then not given expression in Hebrew poetry.<sup>47</sup>

This technique not only enabled Morpurgo to deploy canonical (male) Hebrew texts to express her feminine voice in the hidden layer of the palimpsest. It also endowed her with a unique voice as a nineteenth-century Hebrew woman poet whose writings were distinguished from those of her male contemporaries. Some of these contemporaries, such as Adam HaKohen and Yehudah Leib Gordon, also re-read canonical texts from a viewpoint that was resisting, maskilic, and modern and expressed their new reading in poetic form.<sup>48</sup> Yet Morpurgo's poems remain distinctive by virtue of the individuality of their author's standpoint. Unlike the contemporary male *maskil*, her reading and Re-Vision express the viewpoint not of modern secular Haskalah, but of a woman poet who strives to give voice to a female viewpoint and to the pain of her exclusion from the center of the intellectual religious world of which she considers herself to be an integral part. When using canonical sources in a new way, she thus achieves two aims, both specifically important to the woman poet: she discovers a language suitable for expressing her female identity, and she does so within the Hebrew canonical tradition, thus demonstrating her position within it.<sup>49</sup>

#### FROM THE GENDER MARGINS: FEMALE APPROPRIATION OF CANONICAL TEXTS

Morpurgo's unique use of the cultural resources at her disposal will be demonstrated below through an analysis of stanzas taken from three poems she wrote in response to poems of praise written by male readers: "And These Are Rachel's Words" ("Ve'eleh divrei Raḥel"), "The Mandrakes Begat Poetry" ("Haduda'im shirah holidu") and "Look, This One is New" ("Re'eh, zeh ḥadash hu").<sup>50</sup>

##### *"And These Are Rachel's Words" (1847)*

This sonnet begins with the speaker's surprisingly wretched and bitter response to the wonderment elicited by her poems when they were first published in

*Kokhvei Yitsḥaq*: “Woe unto me, my soul says, bitterly pained.”<sup>51</sup> At first reading, the sonnet appears to be a humble description of the author’s poetic skills, which seemingly do not justify any amazement. In the second stanza especially, she describes the feebleness of her poetry, to which she attributes the fact that she will be relegated to oblivion in the future, as well as her choice to remain silent.

רוּחִי יָשִׁיב אֵלַי: רִיחִי נָמַר,	My spirit returns to me: my scent has turned ill [lit. has changed]
גּוֹלָה אַחַר גּוֹלָה, עוֹרֵי סָמֵר,	Exile after exile has stiffened my skin,
טַעְמִי לֹא עָמַד בִּי, כַּרְמֵי זָמַר,	My taste is spent, my vineyard cut thin,
מִכְלָמוֹת אֶפְקֶה, לֹא עוֹד אֲשִׁיר.	I dread shame, and will not sing on.

However, as is typical of Morpurgo’s palimpsestic poetry, the enigmatic nature of the stanza (why is she in exile? why does she suffer so much?) and the denseness of allusions to canonical texts invite us to examine the canonical textual contexts as a means of deciphering the stanza’s full meaning. Two canonical texts are here referenced simultaneously. The first is a description of Moab in Jeremiah 48:11: “Moab has been serene from his youth, and he has rested on his lees, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, *neither has he gone into captivity: Therefore, his taste remained in him, and his scent has not turned ill.*” The second is a religious poem (*piyyut*) by Solomon ibn Gabirol, “Shelishit shoqedet meshaleshet tsevahah,” in which the exiled Jewish people (femininely personified as *Kenesset Yisra’el*) is compared to a suffering woman, and Morpurgo’s poem repeats some of its phrases: “Her heart and flesh in awe of You have *stiffened*; she contemplates in the bitterness of her spirit; behold *I am bitterly pained*; will I forever be sent out into *exile*; and its *scent* has not *turned ill*.”<sup>52</sup>

Morpurgo’s use of Ibn Gabirol’s *piyyut* is based, firstly, on turning the poetic vehicle into the focus of the description. The picture of the suffering woman (the vehicle in the *piyyut*) is released from its subjugation to the tenor of the national description (*Kenesset Yisra’el*) and thus becomes an expression of female suffering, exclusion, and silencing. Moreover, by changing from third to first person,

the description is no longer that of a distant female other but is appropriated for a female self-description, that of the writer herself. The description of biblical Moab is also used by Morpurgo by way of negation in order to depict the female poet. The national other, an historical national enemy, is transmuted into an image of the male other who, unlike her, need not fear that his poems will lose their taste or scent because of his hegemonic, confident, and complacent position. By juxtaposing allusions to the two canonical texts, Morpurgo reads them in a new way: as an embodiment of the contrast between the complacent man and the suffering, excluded woman; between herself, the female poet, and male poets and readers.

Directing the poem's reader to the two canonical sources also enables the poet to expand the description that is only hinted at in the poem and thus deepens the contrast between the female and the male poets. The *piyyut* enriches the depictions of female suffering: "Crushed and oppressed in grass and burrow" and "Her years passed in sorrow and sighing." At the same time, the biblical verse strengthens the contrasting depiction, that of male serenity and confidence, only hinted at in the opening verse: "Moab has been *serene* from his youth, and he has *rested* on his lees, and *has not been emptied from vessel to vessel.*"

The Re-Vision of canonical texts thus enables the author to find within the hegemonic language of the male textual sources a language in which she can protest her marginal gender position as a woman poet. The discovery of the hidden layer of the poem enables the reader to hear Morpurgo's authentic voice of protest, which conveys an entirely different message than the poem's explicit layer, in which her feminine weakness seems to be described submissively.

### *"The Mandrakes Begat Poetry" (1850)*

Morpurgo begins this poem, written in response to Adolf Ehrentheil's poem of praise, "The Mandrakes," with three lines that politely express her thanks for the poem that extols her and women's poetry.<sup>53</sup> However, the stanza concludes with a surprising line and a no less surprising comment added by the poet:

הַדּוֹמָאִים שִׁירָה הוֹלִידוּ	The Mandrakes begat poetry
וּבְנֵעַם שִׁיר כָּרוּר הִגִּידוּ	And with poetic grace clearly stated
עַם קוֹל כְּנֹר אֲנִי שׁוֹרֶרֶת	With the voice of a harp I sing
*אִז הָיִיתִי כְּמוֹ סוֹרֶרֶת.	*Then would I be as a rebel.
*Poet's note: Take a harp, go about	
הָעִיר הַמְּחֻבְּרָת: קַחִי כְנֹר סְבִי	the city, O forgotten harlot. <sup>54</sup>
עִיר זוֹנָה נִשְׁכַּחָה.	

The third line of the stanza turns the poem on its head. It seems to describe the lovely pleasantness of her poems, responding to the description of the pleasantness of the song of women in Ehrentheil's poem ("How lovely is your song to the sound of your harp"). However, the next line with the note appended to it places a question mark over that naïve understanding of the line; if women's song is pleasant, why, then, is the poet "a rebel?" The understanding is made possible, as is typical of Morpurgo's poetry, by means of the poem's hidden layer, which is formed from the combination of the cited texts that portray the singing woman as a harlot.<sup>55</sup> The last word in the line, "rebel" (*soreret*), points to Proverbs 7:10–11: "And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of a harlot, and wily of heart. She is loud and rebellious (*soreret*)—her feet do not remain at home." This layer of meaning is strengthened by the partial citation in the footnote, which directs the reader to Isaiah 23:16: "Take a harp, go about the city, O forgotten harlot; make sweet melody, sing many songs, that you may be remembered." The two verses combine to portray a woman who performs in public like a harlot, a portrait that is diametrically opposed to Ehrentheil's description of the pleasantness of women's singing. It is with this picture rather than Ehrentheil's that the speaker identifies, fully aware of the traditional approach that completely disavows all forms of public singing by women. She nevertheless declares her readiness to "sing" as she repeats the almost homophonous words that define her: *shoreret* ("woman poet") and *soreret* ("rebellious woman").

The stanza thus takes on its full meaning based on an understanding of the cited texts, which create the hidden layer of the poem, as the poet reads the biblical verses from her female marginal position and ironically identifies with the harlot, like whom she "sings" in public. The poetic speaker's surprising willingness to identify with the harlot embodies a particularly vigorous protest against the inability of men to treat a woman poet as an equal, as well as a protest against the rejection of a

woman's voice in the public sphere—and, with it, a rejection of a woman poet. From the speaker's female point of view, the traditional male identification of a woman's voice with prostitution thus becomes preposterous. The bitter irony is aimed not only at Ehrentheil's poem but also at the woman's exclusion from traditional Jewish society as a whole.

*“Look, This One is New” (1858)*

Morpurgo wrote this poem as a response to two poems of praise, one by Leopold Winkler—“Tehilah leRaḥel” (“In Praise of Rachel”)—and the other by Stern—“LeRaḥel” (“To Rachel”)—both published in *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq* 24 (1858). At first reading, it appears to be a conventionally “feminine” poem in which she humbly accepts the compliments heaped upon her.<sup>56</sup> According to this reading, the second stanza would appear to express Morpurgo's awareness of her weakness as a woman and of her consequent limited capabilities.

לא יש לאל ידי להזק בְּדָק	I have it not in my power to make repairs
כִּי אִם דָּרַשׁ שְׁלוֹם וְלִשְׁפֹּט צָדִיק	But only to seek well-being and judge aright
הִנֵּה דְבוֹרָה שׁוֹפֵטָה הִיא	Indeed, Deborah was a judge
לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה עוֹלָה [עוֹלָה] וְלֹה אֶתָּה.	I shall do no wrong, <sup>57</sup> and that befits her. <sup>58</sup>

However, the first, baffling line—What are the “repairs” that the speaker is unable to make?—hints at a possibly dual-layered poem and sends the reader to review the biblical text alluded to in this phrase. The act of making repairs (*bedeq*) to the house (the temple) is described in 2 Kings 12:8–13, where it is depicted as a hegemonic masculine activity requiring authority, power, and money and carried out by men only—by the king, the priests, and the craftsmen:

So *King* Jehoash summoned the *priest* Jehoiada and the other *priests* and said to them: “[...] do not accept *money* from your benefactors any more;

but have it donated for the repair of the House. [...] to pay the *carpenters* and the *laborers* who worked on the House of the Lord, and *the masons* and the *stonecutters*.

The speaker's criticism of such worship of God is hinted at not only by the allusions to maleness, money, and power but also by the first line of the stanza, "I have it not in my power [*lo' yeish le'el yadi*] to make repairs." This alludes to Laban's declaration to Jacob in Genesis 31:29: "I have it in my power (*yeish le'el yadi*) to do you harm." At the price of poor syntax (*lo' yeish* instead of *ein*), she preserves the negative connotation of the original verse and hints at her negative opinion of this hegemonic way of serving God.

Instead, she proposes an alternative path: to "seek well-being" (*derosh shalom*) and to "judge aright" (*shifat tsedeg*), two expressions referring to a different realm altogether. The first alludes to Jeremiah 29:4–7, where the prophet encourages the exiles to live a normal life in their lands of dispersion: "Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. Take wives and beget sons and daughters [...] And seek the well-being (*dirshu et shelom*) of the city." The second signpost is to Proverbs 31:9: "Speak up, judge righteously (*shifat tsedeg*), champion the poor and needy," an exhortation that complements the depiction of tranquil living in the prior phrase: "seek well-being."

A new, subversive meaning is thus given to canonical texts by Morpurgo's Re-Vision from the gender margins. In the hidden layer of the poem, Morpurgo rejects the "repairs" (praised by the Bible) because they embody the hegemonic masculine worship of God. Instead she offers an alternative path to divine worship: tranquil family life, strong ties with the community, and the demand for justice. The centrality of justice in this religious ideal leads Morpurgo also to negate Winkler's description of Deborah the judge as arrogant ("In her exultation, she was haughty indeed").<sup>59</sup> This she does by both relating to his judgement, which she negates ("Deborah was a judge / I shall do no wrong,"), and by positioning Deborah as the female ideal at the end of the next stanza: "Therefore shall she be the crown of women."

Morpurgo's poetry does repay careful reading and certainly deserves more recognition than it conventionally received after her death. Her poems, which display a unique method of appropriating canonical Hebrew resources, reflect the various

layers of the singular duality that she embodied. One facet of her personality consisted of her scholarship and identification with the traditional societal hegemony, which was fostered by the exceptional cultural environment of Italian Jewry, and especially Trieste, where she lived, and the traditions of the Luzzatto family, into which she was born. But another facet of her personality was her protest against the norm of gender exclusion that positioned her on the margins of the sociocultural hegemonic center. It was from this complex dual identity that she carved out a poetic niche of her own and a unique path in Hebrew poetry. Her poetry, therefore, in the terms used by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, “challenged the language” and made it “follow a sober revolutionary path”.

## NOTES

- 1 The epigraph is from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 19.
- 2 Samuel David Luzzatto (1800–1860) was a poet, biblical exegete, Hebrew linguist, philosopher, literary scholar, translator, principal of the rabbinical college of Padua, Italy, and a prominent figure in the Jewish Haskalah.
- 3 Rachel Morpurgo, ‘*Ugav Raḥel. Sefer kollel shirim ve’iggerot umikhtavim shonim [...] vesippur toldot hamehaberet by Issac Hayyim Castiglioni* (Krakow: Yosef Fisher, 1890).
- 4 For a list of nine poems, their authors, and references, see Tova Cohen, ‘*Ugav ne’elam. Ḥayeha vitsirata shel hameshoreret hayehudiya italkiya Raḥel Morpurgo* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2016), 652.
- 5 On contemporary biographies of Morporgu, and other references to her, see Cohen, ‘*Ugav ne’elam*, 59–61. See also Louise Hecht, “Das ‘Phänomen’ Rachel Luzzatto/Morpurgo (1790–1871),” *Terumah* 16 (2006): 127–95.
- 6 Joseph Klausner, *Historiyah shel hasifrut ha’ivrit beḥadashah*, 6 vols. (Jerusalem: Ahiasaf, 1953), 4:38–49. He concludes the chapter with a disdainful “She cannot be ignored.”
- 7 Dan Miron, *Imahot meyasdot, aḥayot ḥorgot. ‘Al reishit shirat hanashim ha’ivrit* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004), 11–12. See the discussion of Zemorah’s preface in Wendy I. Zierler, *And Rachel Stole the Idols: The Emergence of Modern Hebrew Women’s Writing* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 28–29.

- 8 Marina Arbiv, "Gerushei hem nisu'ai. Qri'ah meḥudeshet beshirata shel Raḥel Morpurgo," *Gag* 12 (2005) 141–50; Marina Arbiv "Una voce femminile in difesa della qabbalah: Rahel Morpurgo (1790–1871)," *Materia giudaica. Rivista dell'associazione italiana per lo studio del giudaismo* 15–16 (2010–11): 397–404; Yaffa Berlovitz, "Raḥel Morpurgo. Hateshuqah el hamavet, hateshuqah el hashir. Letiv'ah shel hameshoreret ha'ivrit harishonah," in *Sadan 2. Meḥqarim besifrut 'ivrit*, ed. Ziva Shamir (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1996), 11–40; Yaffa Berlovitz, "Meshoreret bein hashurot. Qri'ah be'Tshurat Dudaim', shir hitkatvut shel Raḥel Morpurgo," in *Mi mefaḥed mivirginoyot. Nashim kotvot nashiyut*, ed. Tamar Mishmar (Tel Aviv: Agudat Sofrim Ve' omanim, 2009), 142–45; Tova Cohen, "Betokh hatarbut umiḥutzah la. 'Al nikhus sefat ha'av kederekh le'itsuv intelektuali shel demut ha'ani hanashi," in *Sadan 2: Meḥqarim Be-Sifrut 'Ivrit*, ed. Ziva Shamir (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1996), 69–110; Hecht, "Das 'Phänomen"; Zierler *And Rachel Stole*; and Gabriella Moscatti Steindler, "Trieste vetarbutah le'or shiratah shel Raḥel Morpurgo," *Studies in Hebrew Language and Literature: Proceedings of the 15th Hebrew Scientific European Congress. University of Milan, September 2000* (Brit Ivrit Olamit, 2000), 74–79.
- 9 Although Trieste was under Austro-Hungarian rule until 1918, its Jewish community originated in Italy and, in terms of cultural affiliation, constituted an integral part of the Italian Jewish milieu. The first two Hebrew women poets in eastern Europe, Hannah Bluma Soltz and Sarah Shapira, wrote almost a generation later, in the 1880s, and only a few poems; see Tova Cohen and Shmuel Feiner, *Qol 'almah 'ivriyah. Kitvei nashim maskilot bame'ah hatesha' 'esre* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2006), 268–80. For a discussion of the method of literary ecology and its application in Hebrew literature, see Avidov Lipsker, "Hasiaḥ 'al harepubliqah hasifrutit vehasiaḥ ha ekologi 'al hasifrut," *Mikkan* 3 (2002): 5–32.
- 10 Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Fountain, 1929), chapter three.
- 11 Cohen and Feiner, *Qol 'almah*, 13–17.
- 12 Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 49.
- 13 Howard Adelman, "Italian Jewish Women," in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith R. Baskin (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 152. Earlier, Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 133 criticized Roth's generalization, writing: "The time was not yet ripe for emancipation, not even in Renaissance Italy."
- 14 Adelman, "Italian Jewish Women," 156 and Ilan Fuchs, "Talmud Torah lenashim be'italyah biyme'i habenayim uvereshit ha'et heḥadashah. Sheloshah diyyunim hilkhatiim," *Massekhet* 8 (2008): 29–49.

- 15 Simcha Assaf, *Megorot letoldot bahinukh beyisra'el*, ed. Shmuel Glick, 3 vols. (New York: Jewish Theological Society, 2001). 2:256–57; Tali Brenner, “Me‘olama shel na‘ara yehudiyah beitalya bame‘a hashesh ‘esre,” *Kolech* (2003): parashat Terumah, Adar I, 5763, 3–4; Brenner, “Yeda‘, merhav uma‘amad. Nashim yehudiyot beitalya ba‘et ha hadashah hamuqdemet” (MA thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2004); and Brenner, “Melammedet alef-bet. Nashim melamdot betalmudei torah be‘italyah,” *Massekhet* 4 (2005): 11–33.
- 16 M. Di Giulio, “Italy, Hebrew in (Modern Period),” *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, ed. Geoffrey Khan (Boston: Brill 2013), [http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-hebrew-language-and-linguistics/italy-modern-period-EHLL\\_COM\\_00000522?s.num=7#d45925247e12](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopedia-of-hebrew-language-and-linguistics/italy-modern-period-EHLL_COM_00000522?s.num=7#d45925247e12).
- 17 For her poems, see Morpurgo, ‘*Ugav Rachel*, 57, 64. Tamar Luzzatto-Gironi also wrote at least one Hebrew letter; see Cohen, ‘*Ugav Ne‘elam*, 173. *Haggadah. Racconto degli avvenimenti memorabili occasionanti la Pasqua*, rev. Signor Mayer Randegger (Vienna: Stamperia d’Adalberto della Torre, 1851). In his introduction, Randegger specifically states that the text was translated by his daughter. See also Yael Levin, “Ha‘ishah shetirgemah et ha‘haggadah le‘Italkit: sippurah shel Flora Randegger Friedenberg” *Kolech* (Nissan, 2003): 2–4.
- 18 Lois Dubin and David Sorkin “The Port Jew: Notes Toward a Social Type,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50, no. 1 (1999): 87–97. However, it should be noted that this fine balance was disturbed in the mid-nineteenth century, when the community experienced a wave of secularization and assimilation as a result of which scholarly *maskilim* distanced themselves from the community; see Cohen, ‘*Ugav Ne‘elam*, 49–52.
- 19 The intracommunal controversy generated by Joseph II’s Edict of Tolerance is detailed in Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment: Jewish Culture and Contexts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 87–104.
- 20 Naphtali Herz Wessely, “Second Letter: A Reply to the Men of Faith in the city of Trieste [...] entitled [wishing] all good on the House of Israel,” in Wessely, *Divrei shalom ve‘emet* (Berlin: n.p., 1782), n.p.
- 21 Biographical details of Rachel Morpurgo’s life appear in Luzzatto’s two memoirs: “Toldot Shmuel David Luzzatto ‘ad Shenat 5574. Katavti otam ani bishenat 5597,” printed in Menachem (Emanuel) Bondi, *Mikhtevai sefat qodesh* (Prag: Pascheles, 1857), 62–74 and *Pirgei Hayyim*, ed. Moses Avigdor Shulvass (New York: Yeshiva University, 1951). There is also an informative letter that Shadal sent to Mendel Stern, the editor of *Kokhvei Yitsbaq* in 1847, published in *Kokhvei*

- Yitsḥaq* 35 (1868): 15–18. It was on these sources that Castiglioni based his biographical introduction to Morpurgo, ‘*Ugav Rachel*. His short biography is also based on testimony that he received from Morpurgo’s daughter and on his personal knowledge as a Triestian who knew many of Morpurgo’s acquaintances.
- 22 Luzzatto, *Pirḳei ḥayyim*, 24. The brothers Isaac and Ephraim Luzzatto were doctors and poets. Ephraim’s book of poetry, *Eleh benei hane’ urim*, was first published in London in 1768. Isaac’s poems were published as a book, *Toldot Yitsḥaq*, only in 1944 in Tel Aviv, although they were well known to the family.
- 23 *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq* 35 (1868): 17.
- 24 In thus facilitating his daughter’s entry to the world of Hebrew literacy and study, Rachel’s father was establishing a precedent that, some thirty years later in Eastern Europe, would become a pattern; see Tova Cohen, “Portrait of the *Maskilah* as a Young Woman,” *Nashim* 15 (2008): 9–29. On this trend among the Triestian elite, see Dubin and Sorkin, “Port Jew,” 112.
- 25 According to Castiglioni in Morpurgo, ‘*Ugav Rachel*, 5, the first teacher was Ḥizqiya Luzzatto, the father of Samuel David. After him, she studied with Rabbi David Luzzatto, and from the age of fourteen, she studied Talmud with a “well-known rabbi named Ben Nadiv from Mantoba.”
- 26 This is according to Shadal’s description, *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq* 35 (1868): 17. Shadal devotes a separate section in the same letter to the purchase of *Sefer haZohar* and its importance for Morpurgo.
- 27 Cohen, “Portrait,” 18–19.
- 28 In his memoirs, Shadal discussed the importance of this relationship for him during those years: “Rachel was knowledgeable in Bible and Talmud and Zohar and she also liked poetry, and her company was very beneficial to Shadal during those times” (Luzzatto, “Toldot,” 68).
- 29 Shadal describes one theoretical debate in his memoirs: “A few days after the death of his mother S. D. argued with Rachel about the matter of a spirit in animals. She said that not only humans have a spirit and offered proof from the Bible, where it says that the blood is the spirit, and he argued that all other animals also have a soul” (Luzzatto, “Toldot,” 68).
- 30 According to the records of the Jewish community; see Hecht, “Das ‘Phänomen,’” 110.
- 31 Preface to Morpurgo, ‘*Ugav Rachel*, 7.

- 32 Morpurgo, *‘Ugav Rachel*, 7.
- 33 Cohen, “Portrait,” 19.
- 34 Because she married at a relatively late age (twenty-nine), she was able to devote more time than was usual in contemporary traditional society to learning and developing her independent intellectual personality. I surmise that this was why those years left an especially strong impression.
- 35 Her self-identification with the biblical Jacob is apparent from her appropriation, in the first person, of the remarks about Laban attributed to Jacob in Genesis 32:4 (designed to be transmitted to Esau): “Thus says your servant Jacob: ‘I have been living with Laban and have remained there [alternatively: was late] until now.’” In Morpurgo’s poem, the version reads: “With Laban I lived and hence was late.”
- 36 Morpurgo, *‘Ugav Rachel*, 87. See Zierler, *And Rachel Stole*, 78 for the translation and an analysis of the poem. Morpurgo also expressed her feeling of being imprisoned and of choking in a letter to Hindel Greenwald in Jerusalem, to whom she described her inability to immigrate to Erets Yisra’el because she was constrained by her obligations: “But I am like Daniel in the lions’ den and I cannot escape except by a miracle. And I further regret that my hands are fettered in iron chains and it is impossible” (Morpurgo, *‘Ugav Rachel*, 17, unknown date).
- 37 Keren Fite, “From Savage Passion to the Sweetness of Self-Control: Female Anger in Little Women and ‘Pauline’s Passion and Punishment,’” *Women’s Writing* 14, no. 3 (2007): 436.
- 38 Introduction to Morpurgo, *‘Ugav Rachel*, 7.
- 39 The letter is dated October 12, 1838 and is located in the Shadal archive, Centro Bibliografico dell’Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane, Rome (item 2496). The letter appears to have been written very quickly; the handwriting is much less clear than in other letters, and Morpurgo even foregoes the accepted polite introduction, apparently to save time. The three poems are “Understanding Proverbs and Parables” (“Lehavin mashal umelitsah”), “On my Belly Shall I Go” (“‘Al hagaḥon Ani elekh”), “There Shall Come a Star Out of Jacob” (“Darakh kokhav miya ‘aqov”).
- 40 Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979), 72–73.
- 41 According to Dubin and Sorkin, “Port Jew,” 173, Trieste Jewry showed signs of a weakening attachment to orthodox halakhah as early as the late eighteenth

- century. The processes of secularization and assimilation accelerated after the 1848 revolution, when increasing numbers of Jews expressed a wish to integrate into local Italian non-Jewish society. See also Tullia Catalan, *La comunità ebraica di Trieste (1781–1914). Politica, società e cultura* (Trieste: LINT, 2000), 252. For a more extensive discussion of the opposition to assimilation and the importance of nationalism in Morpurgo's poetry, see Cohen, 'Ugav Ne'elam 329–52.
- 42 This duality is characteristic of today's orthodox Jewish feminism, of which Rachel Morpurgo was in several respects one of the harbingers. I have addressed that issue in Tova Cohen, "Qol 'od nafshi bi ezkor torat Mosheh'. Raḥel Morpurgo (1790–1871) kelamdanit," in *Ruah ḥadashah be'armon hatorah. Sefer yovel likhvod Prof. Tamar Ross bebagi'ah ligvurot*, ed. Ronit Ir-Shai and Dov Schwartz (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2018), 245–73.
- 43 Dan Pagis, *Ḥidush umasoret beshirat haḥol be'ivrit. Sefarad ve'italyah* (Jerusalem: Simania, 1976), 72, finds this technique relevant to the use in Spanish and Italian Hebrew poetry of biblical appropriations, "whose principal effect lies in the knowledge of their source." The working assumption, which also applies to Morpurgo's poems, is that the reader would recall the texts associatively; see Ezra Fleischer, *Shirat haqodesh ha'ivrit biyemei habenayim* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2008), 103.
- 44 Indeed, she does so in such poems as "Current Events" ("Korot ha-zeman" in Morpurgo, 'Ugav Raḥel, 59), "On the Fugitives from Cholera" ("Al haborḥim miketev hakolera" in Morpurgo, 'Ugav Raḥel, 72), and "It is a Lamentation" ("Qinah hi" in Morpurgo, 'Ugav Raḥel, 74–75).
- 45 In this sense, classical Hebrew fits the description of a "father tongue"; see Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 250–51.
- 46 Adrienne Cecile Rich, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence, Selected Prose, 1966–1978* (New York: Norton, 1979), 35. This is a reading that, according to Rich, women writers have to conduct in order to find their place and means of expression within canonical patriarchal culture.
- 47 On women being resisting readers, see, e.g., Patrocínio P. Schweickart, "Towards a Feminist Theory of Reading," in *Gender and Reading*, ed. Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocínio Schweickart (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1986), 40–43.
- 48 On the way in which these poets juxtapose their maskilic views with biblical texts, see Tova Cohen, "Hatekhniah halamdanit. Tsofen shel sifrut hahaskalah," *Mehqerei Yerushalayim besifrut 'ivrit* 13 (1992): 131–69.

- 49 As Elaine Showalter, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness," in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. Elaine Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), 265 has pointed out, female writing rests on two bases: the female marginal world and the male hegemonic culture. In her words, "A woman's text [...] confronts both paternal and maternal precursors and must deal with the problems and advantages of both lines of inheritance."
- 50 For a full analysis of these poems, see Cohen, 'Ugav ne'elam: "And These Are Rachel's Words" ("Ve'eleh divrei Raḥel," 289–91, 398–400); "The Mandrakes Begat Poetry" ("Haduda'im shirah holidu," 138–40, 425–27); "Look, This One is New" ("Re'eh, zeh ḥadash hu," 295–96, 473–75).
- 51 Morpurgo, 'Ugav Raḥel, 54, translated by Zierler, *And Rachel Stole*, 25. Zierler also analyzes the poem there. Morpurgo's appropriation of canonical texts in this poem was already described in my early article, Cohen, "Betokh hatarbut," albeit without reference to the palimpsest phenomenon.
- 52 R. Solomon ibn Gabirol, "Shelishit shoqedet meshaleshet tsevaḥah"; see Dov Yarden, *Shirei haqodesh lerabbi Shelomo ibn Gabirol* (Jerusalem: American Academy of Jewish Studies, 1977), 1:303–4. The poem appeared in *Maḥzor Aragon* from Thessalonica, 1529, but I have no proof that Morpurgo was familiar with this holiday prayer book. Perhaps the text reached her via Shadal, who was well versed in the various publications of the liturgical poetry of Spain.
- 53 *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq* 13 (1850): 44–45.
- 54 Morpurgo, 'Ugav Raḥel, 63. The comment appeared in the first publication of the poem (*Kokhvei Yitsḥaq* 14 (1851): 84) but was omitted from Morpurgo, 'Ugav Raḥel.
- 55 It should be noted that, in Hebrew, the word *shirah* denotes both poetry and singing, so that a woman poet may be portrayed as "singing," like the harlot in the biblical verse.
- 56 Winkler had compared Morpurgo to the great women of the Bible, arguing that she surpassed them. Morpurgo begins her response by rejecting his views and portraying herself as less worthy than the biblical heroines: "If a flame fell upon the cedars, / The elect women of the world [...] Who else would stand in their place?" In so doing, she not only presented a more modest portrait of herself but also registered her complaint at the way in which Winkler had disparaged the women of the Bible. The technique here is significant. The first line quoted above is a citation from a folio of the Babylonian Talmud (Mo'ed Qatan 25b), which discusses appropriate ways of eulogizing. A subsequent passage on the same page

records a sharp exchange between scholars, which perhaps complements the criticism that Morpurgo voices in the second stanza of her poem, which is devoted to male religious conduct. I am indebted to Wendy Zierler for her comment on the textual connection between the two stanzas.

- 57 When first published in *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq*, the poem was not vowelized and, as in other cases, Castiglioni added the vowels in Morpurgo, ‘*Ugav Raḥel*. It seems to me that Castiglioni erred in vowelizing the word as ‘*olah* (“offering”), and I believe it should have been vowelized as ‘*avlah* (“injustice”), as in the verse “The Lord is righteous within her; He will do no injustice” (Zephaniah 3:5). I have changed the translation accordingly.
- 58 Morpurgo, ‘*Ugav Raḥel*, 83. Translation based on Zierler, *And Rachel Stole*, 91. See also her analysis of the poem there.
- 59 *Kokhvei Yitsḥaq* 24 (1858): 93.